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ABSTRACT

Six case studies of foreign language programs in diverse Australian secondary schools conducted as part of an effort to learn the state of secondary level foreign language instruction are presented. The studies were conducted through administrator, teacher, and student interviews, on-site observation, and verification of the final report by the school's administration. The major issues looked at include administrator, teacher, and student attitudes toward the teaching and learning of foreign languages, their views on certain administrative aspects of their own programs, and their perceptions of each other's views. The administrative issues looked at include: scheduling; course structure; the benefits, difficulties, and student expectations of foreign language study; resources and learning environments; administrative and external support; teacher allocation and competence; classroom and extra-curricular activities; reasons for the foreign language enrollment decline; and predictions about future trends. The six programs include three large metropolitan state high school programs, a medium-sized all-boys Catholic secondary school program, a small independent all-girls school in a provincial city, and a state secondary class attached to a state primary school. The programs included two each in French, Japanese, and Italian. (MSE)

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Report No. 2

Studies in Six Schools

Research Branch
Department of Education, Queensland

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Report No. 2

Studies in Six Schools

Kerry Fairbairn
Catherine Pegolo

Research Branch
Department of Education
Queensland

April 1983
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INTRODUCTION

THE STUDIES IN CONTEXT

In 1982, an evaluation project Foreign Languages in Secondary Schools (FLSS) was conducted on behalf of the Board of Secondary School Studies and the Queensland Department of Education. The project was initiated because of a concern for the state of foreign languages in Queensland. One major phase of the project was to conduct six studies in Queensland secondary schools.

These studies were designed to complement the data gathered during the two other phases of the FLSS project. One of these phases was designed to give a broad overview of the present foreign language situation and the trends that have occurred in recent years. These data are presented in *Foreign Languages in Secondary Schools, Report No. 1: A Statistical Background Report on Foreign Languages in Queensland Secondary Schools* (Evaluation Series, Research Branch, Queensland Department of Education, November 1982) which shows trends in foreign languages in Queensland secondary schools from 1974 to 1982.

The other phase consisted of the gathering by questionnaire of information from Year 12 students in a random sample of Queensland State and non-State secondary schools in 1982. Two questionnaires were designed in order to obtain the opinions and attitudes of students regarding foreign languages. One questionnaire was aimed at Year 12 students who were studying a foreign language. A second questionnaire was geared to Year 12 students who had once studied a foreign language but did not continue to Year 12. A subsection of the same questionnaire was to be answered by Year 12 students who had not studied a foreign language at all. The results of these questionnaire surveys will appear in a report in the Evaluation Series, Research Branch, Queensland Department of Education.

Thus three main types of data collection methods have been used: compilation of existing statistics; questionnaire survey; and direct observation/interview. These three approaches should complement each other and allow for a reasonably comprehensive understanding of foreign languages in Queensland secondary schools.

ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE STUDIES

The six studies are intended to examine a range of specific school contexts in which foreign languages are offered. For this reason, the schools chosen for the study vary according to geographical location (metropolitan/country), size (large to small) and type (State/Catholic/independent; co-educational/segregated). The first of the studies was undertaken in July 1982, while the last one was completed in November 1982.

While some of the information collected relates to all foreign languages, each study focuses principally on either French, Italian or Japanese as do the other two major phases of the FLSS project. These languages are considered to be reasonably representative of the range of foreign languages taught in Queensland secondary schools. The schools in which studies were conducted, and the focus languages in each school are summarised as follows.

School 1: large metropolitan State high school in north Queensland — French
School 2: medium sized all boys Catholic secondary school in far north Queensland — Italian
School 3: large metropolitan State high school in south-east Queensland — Japanese
School 4: large metropolitan State high school in south-east Queensland — Italian
School 5: small independent all girls school in a provincial city in the central Queensland coastal area — Japanese
School 6: a State secondary department* in the Darling Downs region — French

The time spent in each school varied, as did the number of researchers, depending on the size of the school. For example, three and one-half days were spent by two researchers and one further day was spent by one researcher in the largest of the six schools. In contrast to this, one and one-half days were spent by two researchers in the secondary department, which was the smallest school visited.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDIES

The present series of studies involved the interviewing of principals, foreign language teachers and students studying foreign languages. In each case, the foreign language teacher(s) responsible for the particular language focused upon, was interviewed. Where there was a foreign language co-ordinator, a separate interview was also arranged with that person. For the student interviews, classes from the lower and the upper school were chosen. (This did not apply to the secondary department in these studies, which did not have classes beyond Year 10.) It should be noted that the availability of teachers and students for interviewing depended on the period during which each school was visited.

In addition to the interviews, observations of classroom activities were conducted. The observations were organised to suit the teachers concerned, so that any correspondence between classes interviewed and classes observed was coincidental. In some cases, however, it was possible to observe classes in both the lower and the upper schools.

Finally, each study was written up and sent back to the appropriate school for verification. Comments by schools during this phase were taken into account in the preparation of final reports.

ISSUES COVERED

The major issues covered in the studies pertained to the attitudes of principals, foreign language teachers and students towards the teaching and learning of foreign languages, as well as their views on certain organisational and administrative aspects of foreign languages in the particular school concerned. Moreover, these same groups were asked to give their perceptions of each other's views, and those of others, on the same range of issues. Issues explored included aspects of timetabling and course structure, the benefits, difficulties and student expectations of foreign language study, resources and learning environments, administrative and external support, teacher allocation and competence, classroom and extra-curricular activities, reasons for the decline in foreign language enrolments, and predictions about future trends.

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* Secondary classes attached to a State primary school.

Information was also gathered in order to produce a general school profile. To this end, data were included concerning the student population, proportion of ethnic representation and subject choice within the school curriculum. A survey was made in each school of library and audio-visual resources relating to the particular foreign language of each study.

INTERPRETING THE STUDIES

While it is possible over the limited time span indicated above, to gain a reasonably sound idea of foreign language teaching and attitudes towards foreign languages in the schools, it is certainly not possible to present a detailed representative picture. To achieve this, much more time would be needed than was possible to spend in this project and a fairly large number of visits would have to be scheduled over a year.

For these reasons, the studies should be seen more in terms of shedding light on other available information about foreign languages in schools and raising general issues, rather than standing in their own right as definitive statements about foreign languages in the schools selected for study. To this end, a brief general overview of the studies has been provided.

STUDY NO. 1 A large metropolitan State high school in north Queensland – *French*

PROCEDURES USED

A total of four days was spent consecutively in the school, in mid-July 1982. The school principal was interviewed on the first day by the three members of the evaluation team. During the following three days, one member of the team remained in the school to interview the foreign language subject master (whose main language was French) and two other French teachers. Each teacher was interviewed alone for up to two periods. The interviews were conducted during any spare periods, as well as during lunch and after school.

Two class interviews were also carried out during a normal foreign language period. In addition, two French lesson observations were arranged in order to gain an understanding of the general teaching methods employed for foreign languages. A survey of French resources and audio-visual equipment was also carried out.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE SCHOOL

School profile

The total enrolment for the school in this case study was about 1000. In 1982, the student population, drawn from the local community, was principally Anglo-Saxon, with a high proportion of Aboriginal and Islander children. There was also a fairly large percentage of children of Greek parentage. Despite its large overall enrolment, the school had a comparatively low level of enrolments at Years 11 and 12.

	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	TOTAL
1982	274	305	261	119	80	1039

Foreign language background and organisation

At the time of this study, students were able to choose between French and Japanese, i.e. only one of these languages could be taken and no other choice was available from Year 8 to Year 12. The study of a foreign language was compulsory in Year 8 and optional thereafter. In Years 9 and 11, the new ROSBA trial syllabus* was being implemented, as the school was a Phase I ROSBA school.

In Years 9 and 10, the foreign language options were timetabled against citizenship education, woodwork and metalwork, and were not offered to the fully technical and commercial streams of students. In Years 11 and 12, French and Japanese were timetabled against biology, geometrical drawing and perspective, and ancient history. Although foreign language study was compulsory in Year 8, it was the school policy that those students with poor literacy skills did not take a foreign language, but were given remedial English lessons instead.

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* 'Communicative' language syllabuses being phased into schools over a three year period, 1982–1984.

The foreign language teachers felt that the manner in which the foreign languages had been timetabled against each other, on the same line, did not adversely affect student enrolments. None of them was aware of any complaints by the students with regard to the choice of one language only. One teacher explained that a certain amount of rivalry existed between French and Japanese students, especially in the junior school, which indicated that the two languages attracted very different types of students. The subject master thought it was a shame that the possibility to do both French and Japanese did not exist, but he too doubted that there would be any demand to do both languages.

Language choice

It was pointed out by the principal that the choice between French and Japanese was due to staffing constraints, but he said that Indonesian would also be an ideal foreign language to offer because it was considered to be easier to learn. He believed that Asian languages were more relevant in an Australian context and should be pushed more.

In this school, enrolments in foreign languages in the junior school had risen over recent years. This was the direct result of a conscious promotional effort on the part of the foreign language teachers, with the support of the administration. A major part of this effort concerned the organisation of extra-curricular activities, especially language camps. Enrolments in the foreign language subjects had declined so severely that five years ago there were no students taking a foreign language in Year 12. In 1982, there were sufficient students to offer combined Years 11 and 12 classes in both French and Japanese. This year, more than one-third of the 1981 Year 8 students chose to continue their foreign language study until Year 10. In 1981, there were three Japanese and seven French Year 8 classes. Of these, enough students wanted to continue French and Japanese in Year 9 to form two Japanese and two French classes. It was hoped that this would eventually bolster the waning Years 11 and 12 enrolments. A Japanese student exchange program had also been introduced in the school.

The availability of any subject in the curriculum essentially depended on student demand. However, lower numbers were tolerated in foreign languages compared to the other subjects. In one particular year, only two students had opted to do Japanese in Year 12 and the subject was still offered. This was in contrast to another subject, music, which was not offered even though a few students wished to take it.

It was pointed out by the principal that when parents are asked to decide between French and Japanese for or with their children entering Year 8, the majority didn't have any strong preference. The small proportion of parents who did have a definite preference usually chose Japanese, often stating a reason for their choice. Another group of parents usually expressed negative views about foreign languages generally, and said that learning a foreign language was a waste of time.

Library and audio-visual resources

A brief survey of library resources indicated that foreign languages were reasonably well catered for. Video equipment and copies of French programs were available. Facilities were also available for filming student plays. Some radio broadcasts had been taped. A variety of French games and kits could be borrowed from the library (e.g. Au Marché, Les Saisons, Loto de la Maison, La Bonne Cuisine) as well as French songs (records and cassettes) and slides.

Each school block had an overhead projector and others could be obtained from the library. Also available for classroom use were large and small cassette players, film strip and slide projectors, carousels and record players.

The language section of the library was well stocked with French books. There was a considerable number of simple readers written for native French children, translations of traditional English stories and some USA 'westerns', as well as plays and other French literature.

The grammar books were of a traditional style (prose passages, followed by grammar and exercises, e.g. Horan and Wheeler). French dictionaries ranged from the usual French/English versions, to picture/vocabulary books. A copy of *Le Français Scientifique et Technique* (Books 1 and 2) was also available. There was also *A Guide to Phonetic Theory and Practice*.

The geography section of the library held an extensive range of books covering the following topics: geography and regions of France, people, institutions, places of interest, food and civilisation. There were many photo and picture books, some of which were written in French.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

Three teachers of French (two female, one male, who was also the subject master) and the principal were interviewed separately, in order to gain an overall impression of their personal views relating to foreign languages and foreign language study.

Two classes of French students were interviewed, a Year 8 group (26 students, 50 per cent female) and a combined Year 11 and 12 group (only four students, one male and three female, were present out of the usual seven). It is worth noting that the majority of comments in the Year 8 class were made by the girls, with very little participation from boys. When the boys did make some contributions, their remarks were often frivolous. Despite encouragement from the interviewer, the boys were obviously not eager to contribute any of their ideas and opinions.

Reasons for studying foreign languages and general views about foreign language learning

When asked what they considered to be the benefits to be derived from foreign language study, two of the teachers suggested that learning a foreign language provided students with a broader outlook on life and added that it helped to promote tolerance of people from different ethnic origins. All three teachers agreed that, given the low socio-economic background of the majority of the school population, very few students would have the opportunity to travel overseas. Because of this, the teachers thought many parents and students couldn't see much value in learning a foreign language. Another reason for the low priority given to languages was that they were not seen as being related to future career prospects. However, it was thought by the teachers that the city and region generally were likely to become less isolated because of expanding tourism, particularly from Japan, and that in the near future, a greater demand for foreign languages would arise, especially in banks, hotels, airlines and travel agencies.

It was felt that foreign language study should be compulsory at Year 8 level at least, because it contributed to providing students with a general introduction to the secondary curriculum. All three teachers upheld the school policy of advising students with poor skills in their own language not to undertake foreign language study.

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One teacher suggested that foreign languages should be compulsory only in first semester of Year 8 and that students who couldn't cope with a traditional language course should be given the option of doing a purely culture-oriented course. Another teacher pointed out that foreign language study should be optional from Year 9 onwards, simply because students reacted negatively to anything compulsory. Students who were forced to study a foreign language, and who were not motivated or interested, generally became a nuisance in the classroom. It was suggested that progress in Year 9 could be rapid for those students who truly wanted to study the foreign language.

The reasons given by the students for studying a foreign language varied a great deal between Year 8 and Years 11 and 12. Some Year 8s indicated that they were doing a foreign language simply because it was compulsory. Others said it was interesting, supporting a teacher's claim that (in Year 8) foreign languages were regarded as exotic by the young students. Some Year 8 students thought that a foreign language could be needed for a future job or for travel overseas. One student suggested that it just 'fills up time'. The Years 11 and 12 group claimed that a foreign language was the best choice on a bad line, especially for those students who were not science or arts oriented. Future travel plans were also given as a reason for studying a foreign language.

The Year 8 group studying French cited greater ease in acquiring the writing skill as one of the main reasons for their choice of French instead of Japanese. It was generally agreed that French was a less difficult language to learn than Japanese. This idea was also put forward by the Year 11 and 12 French group, which added that learning French complemented their knowledge of English, since some English words could be derived from French. However, both classes believed that the ideal foreign language student (i.e. someone who could be successful at the language) had to be an intelligent, dedicated, studious person, with a good memory, who enjoyed speaking foreign languages. One student in Year 8 (a boy) suggested that 'there is no ideal'.

One disadvantage in learning a foreign language (cited by the Years 11 and 12 class) was related to the composite arrangement. This had resulted in a reduction of 50 per cent contact time in real terms, since the teacher's attention was divided. Because of the difference in the level of skills and knowledge of the two groups, combined activities were difficult to arrange. This class also thought it was more difficult to obtain a 6 or 7 rating in a foreign language because they were competing with students from private schools who supposedly were not disadvantaged by composite classes, were more motivated and had better teachers. In Years 11 and 12, the advantages of learning a foreign language were associated with future travel plans, being able to communicate with friends from overseas and/or native people in their own country (France) who might be insulted when tourists were unable to speak their language. Another advantage suggested was related to a career in diplomacy.

All students felt that foreign language study was suited to both males and females, but they pointed out that the choice of subjects on the same line as foreign languages, e.g. woodwork and metalwork, was responsible for the low male enrolments. It was also suggested that peer pressure to choose these other subjects was strong amongst the males.

Teachers' perceptions of the attitudes of others towards foreign language study

When the teachers were asked to give their perceptions of the students' attitudes to foreign languages, the responses varied amongst the teachers, but tended to comply with what the students themselves had given as their own views and those of others. One teacher believed that many students who might have liked to continue with their foreign language study, had been forced to drop French or Japanese because of the poor choice on the school's subject choice outline. Another teacher noted that students embarked enthusiastically on their foreign language study but soon developed a negative attitude when, for example, there was too much learning of words and spelling to be covered. She suggested that primary school didn't develop the appropriate skills for successful foreign language learning. Two teachers believed that foreign language study was considered to be 'a frill' by the non-foreign-language students — an attitude which was mostly derived from the parents. This view did not coincide with the opinions expressed by the students on the same issue.

It was generally thought by the teachers that the Year 8 students enjoyed their lessons more than did the higher year levels (Years 9 and 10). One reason given for this by a teacher was that the pace was appropriate and students could see they were progressing. Another teacher had devised a daily 'oral interrogation' for Year 8 students. Four or five students were randomly chosen each lesson to answer questions in French, for which they were assigned an immediate score. This 'instant reward' appeared to be a source of motivation to them. Their teacher believed that the majority of the students worked very hard, probably because of the high amount of oral work which had to be done in front of the class. She suggested that since the students often had to perform in front of their peers, they worked more conscientiously.

However, some problems did arise with Year 8 classes. One teacher said she had a class of fairly low achievers who could not cope with the work, who could see they were not progressing and who, because of this, hated French. This, in turn, affected their motivation to learn, particularly amongst the boys.

The situation with Years 9 and 10 students was not considered to be a positive one. More 'serious' work had to be covered and teachers did not have the time to engage in 'fun' activities which were possible in Year 8. The subject master had indicated on several occasions that the new junior foreign language syllabus was too ambitious, and he felt many students were being left behind.

In Years 11 and 12, it was felt that students knew they were progressing and that they were satisfied with their work. Comments from the students themselves supported their teacher's claim.

There were no complaints from the Year 8 and Years 11 and 12 groups concerning homework. The teachers admitted to giving them little work to do outside class time.

The teachers concurred on their impressions of the guidance officer, whom they claimed was career-oriented and would presumably advise students that a foreign language was not a viable subject in the jobs market. One teacher suspected he was not well acquainted with foreign languages because he had apparently advised some low achievers in Year 8 to do Japanese — this was considered to be a more difficult language than French.

Students' perceptions of the attitudes of others towards foreign language study

When asked about their perceptions of the guidance officer's views on foreign languages, the Year 8 class thought he was neutral and pointed out that, for them, foreign language study was compulsory anyway.

More than half of the Year 8 class indicated that they thought their parents had no strong feelings about the desirability of studying a foreign language and had left the choice of either French or Japanese to them. (This was also the view of the principal.) A few students, however, were encouraged to do foreign languages by their parents.

The Years 11 and 12 class indicated that their form teacher had shown some interest in the Japanese exchange program, and in arts subjects generally. Two of the students thought the guidance officer could only see a limited use for foreign languages (e.g. a career in diplomacy) and had attempted to dissuade two female students from taking a foreign language.

The parents of the Years 11 and 12 students were supportive towards foreign language study but one student could understand why many parents would prefer their children to do more 'practical' subjects such as woodwork.

The Years 11 and 12 students pointed out that the poor choice of subjects on the line had forced some of their friends to choose a non-foreign-language subject. Other constraints against choosing French or Japanese were related to perceived future career demands. Overall, however, it was felt that the attitude towards foreign language study of their peers not doing a foreign language was a positive one.

Students' comments about foreign language teachers

The students were asked to give their opinions on what they regarded as positive and negative characteristics of teachers, and the effects of these traits on students. The Year 8 class said that a 'snob' teacher who made them feel he/she knew more than they did would make them want to discontinue the foreign language. The Years 11 and 12 group claimed that a teacher who would bully students, who didn't tolerate mistakes and who forced them to do a lot of rote learning would make them want to drop the foreign language. Both groups agreed that to attract students to the foreign language subject, the teacher would ideally be a young person. The Years 11 and 12 students added that the teacher should have previously visited the country (i.e. France) and should be able to relate his/her experiences to the class.

When asked to define a 'good' or 'competent' foreign language teacher, the Year 8 students thought the teacher should have a good knowledge of the language and culture. The other class regarded a teacher who got involved with the class and who was able to have a variety of activities in the classroom, as a good and competent teacher.

Lessons and related activities

Both the Year 8 and the Years 11 and 12 groups were confident that they could hold a successful conversation (with their peers and native speakers) about everyday matters such as getting accommodation and ordering a meal. The Year 8 class added that they could talk about the weather, school and places of interest. The Years 11 and 12 class also mentioned giving and understanding directions, discussing prices, being polite and establishing personal relationships.

When asked to describe any other situations they had learnt to deal with in class, the Year 8 class answered the question by explaining that they had covered the following: addition; telling the time; the date; their age; talking about their family; describing the parts of the body; and using the telephone. They added that they had learnt to construct nouns and verbs and how to form plurals. The group generally considered the topics/situations not to be very useful.

The Years 11 and 12 group had dealt with buying things, visiting places, not getting arrested and talking about school. While these were not necessarily the kinds of topics and situations they wanted to deal with in class, they regarded them as the 'basics' upon which they could build if and when they found themselves in France.

The students indicated that although their teachers did not give them a detailed outline of the work to be covered over a period of time, they knew that one lesson would generally follow on from the previous one. The Year 8 classroom activities often involved the whole group in singing songs and playing games such as 'Simon Says' and 'Bingo' in French. Through the subject master's involvement with the local Alliance Française (he was treasurer) some local French residents and visitors had been invited into the classroom. However, one teacher said that such visits were not very successful with the Year 8 students due to lack of discipline. The Year 8 students, though, were generally pleased with such activities since they were a change from the usual 'blackboard' approach. No course book was prescribed for the Year 8 French classes, but worksheets were regularly handed out.

The Years 11 and 12 activities appeared to be much more traditional in approach. Students said they were given compositions, dictations, dialogues to read aloud, aural comprehensions, and oral work such as describing pictures. Each week, a recorded video of a French program *Ensemble*, was watched, and a written French version of *Star Wars* was currently being studied. When asked what they thought of such activities, their reaction was a mixture of apathy and approval. They added that they wished to see more French films. One positive remark was that they were picking up more idiomatic expressions than in previous years.

French camps for students in any year level were organised when possible, as well as Bastille Day celebrations and a drama competition, sponsored by the Alliance Française. Trips to Noumea were not organised because of the cost involved for the students. However, students from this school were invited to help make up the numbers of any Noumea trips organised by a neighbouring school.

Learning environment

A rapid impressionistic assessment of their classroom was made by the Year 8 class. Some claimed it was dull and boring, others thought it was 'okay', not too noisy, and thought the pictures/posters on the walls helped to create a positive atmosphere. However, the class expressed a dislike for the traditional row-behind-row layout of the desks, but did say the teacher sometimes changed the configuration.

The Years 11 and 12 group's reaction to their classroom was largely negative; they claimed it was cold in winter, hot in summer. Lights had only recently been installed, the walls were bare and the students complained of a very noisy teacher in the neighbouring classroom. They said a language block would be ideal. Because of the small number of students in the class, they could all sit in the front row, although a semi-circular arrangement was preferred, but students did not indicate if such an arrangement was used.

Timetable concerns

The teachers were asked to give their opinions about certain organisational aspects of their lessons. Two teachers said they preferred to have one language lesson each day. However, this was not possible in Year 8 because only three periods were allotted for foreign languages per week. In Years 11 and 12, for example, foreign languages were allotted five periods each week, but two of these were timetabled as a double on the same day. With the added problem of weekends, language contact was disrupted for several days. One teacher said that having two morning periods compensated for this, because more work could be covered in early periods.

The length of periods (50 minutes) was regarded as acceptable for the higher year levels, but shorter and more frequent periods were considered preferable for the younger students. However, because administrative constraints made it impossible to organise such classes, teachers said they were using a greater variety of activities in order to hold the attention and interest of the younger students during the 50 minute periods.

For the Year 8 class, three periods of about 50 minutes were the total contact time for French. The students said the teacher tried to spread her attention equally amongst the 26 class members. Years 11 and 12 had five periods of 50 minutes each week, but, as pointed out previously, each year level only had the teacher's attention for about half this time.

Decisions for allocating foreign language teachers to particular year levels were made by the subject master, in consultation with the principal. While the subject master, (the most highly qualified and experienced language teacher) was given the combined French in Year 11 and Year 12, it was not necessarily the school policy that the senior school classes were given to the most qualified teacher. A rotation system was used, when possible, whereby a teacher taught the same cohort of students one year after another. In addition, an attempt was made to give each foreign language teacher an equal number of classes.

Administrative support

Two of the teachers interviewed had found the principal generally supportive towards foreign languages, e.g. he had allowed the language students to have a Friday off in order to attend an extended weekend language camp. One teacher said the principal could see the value in such camps especially for motivating students and helping to maintain their interest in foreign language study. When asked how the principal would react to giving teachers special leave to attend seminars for foreign language teachers, two teachers said that they had not approached him on this matter since no such occasion had arisen. Only the subject master, who was also the only teacher involved in the ROSBA foreign language meetings, had attended a number of seminars over the past four to five years. The teachers also pointed out that no subject area was favoured when the need for resource acquisition arose and that P & C funds were shared on an equal basis. However, there appeared to be a certain reluctance on the part of the language staff to approach the administration for new resources.

When asked to comment on their perceptions of the administration's attitude to foreign languages in the school curriculum generally, all three teachers thought that French and Japanese were regarded as a worthwhile part of the curriculum. One teacher pointed out that the principal had done one semester of French at university. Another teacher believed that the science/mathematics teachers did not regard foreign languages as an important subject in the curriculum.

The only major complaint concerned the combined Years 11 and 12 French class (this was also the case for Years 11 and 12 Japanese), which the teachers conceded could not be avoided due to staffing constraints and low enrolments.

Teachers' general self-evaluation

All three teachers interviewed had a Diploma in Education (or the equivalent), which included a language method subject.

The subject master, the most highly qualified and experienced foreign language teacher, felt that he had a better than average command of the French language, having spent a year in France. He said that, to maintain and improve his present standard of French, he would like to spend three months in France at least every five years. His involvement with the local Alliance Française and the French honours course in which he was enrolled, helped him to keep in touch with the French language.

The second teacher also thought her fluency was better than that of the average graduate, since she had lived in a French-speaking territory in Africa. Because her knowledge of French culture was not good, she relied heavily on resource materials.

The third and youngest teacher (a recent graduate) had not been to a French-speaking country and she said that while her knowledge of French culture was adequate, she was not completely satisfied with her ability to speak French. She had sought to create interest in a French language course at the Alliance Française, but demand was so small that classes could not be organised. She had also applied for a French Assistantship, but had not yet been notified about the outcome.

Condition of foreign languages — present and future

Both classes interviewed were asked to comment on the decline in foreign language enrolments in Queensland secondary schools. The Year 8 students claimed that the decline was due to the fact that foreign language study was difficult. The Years 11 and 12 group expressed a similar opinion, i.e. that it is difficult to *succeed* in foreign language. The Year 8s added that the lack of opportunity to travel and use French or Japanese contributed to the enrolment decline and that English was widely spoken outside Australia. The reasons given by the Years 11 and 12 group for many students not choosing a foreign language were the perceived low career-value of foreign languages and a dislike felt by some students for subjects which had been compulsory in earlier years.

The teachers' views on this issue confirmed to some extent what the students had said. They could see that foreign languages were not considered 'money earners' by the students and thought they were of no use to children from isolated areas. Competition from other more career-oriented subjects and the dropping of the university language requirement were other reasons given for the decline. The subject master added that foreign languages were introduced too late in the school curriculum and that children needed to have a sound knowledge of the structure of their own language before being able to tackle another language successfully.

The teachers were disappointed with the lack of support from the local branch of the MLTAQ. They said that very few worthwhile activities had been organised by the branch in the past, which had resulted in many foreign language teachers not renewing their membership. They also felt there was a need for more in-service training in foreign language teaching techniques and French language, as well as for more co-operation and exchange of ideas with teachers from other schools in the area. The subject master believed that radical changes should occur at the undergraduate level of training, with less emphasis being placed on literature and more on developing language skills.

The overriding attitude to the new ROSBA foreign language syllabus was negative. The subject master, for example, claimed that the Years 9–10 French syllabus was too ambitious, that basing lessons on functions* didn't motivate students and that the literature content was too large. It was thought that integrating culture with language and teaching them in the one lesson was not possible. The subject master was critical of the move away from norm-based assessment, and another teacher claimed that ROSBA had had no effect on her, and in the school generally.

The syllabus committees of the Board of Secondary School Studies were regarded as too remote to provide teachers with assistance. On the whole, teachers' morale was low, they felt threatened by ROSBA and only the most recent graduate had a more positive overall attitude to foreign languages generally and to her position as a foreign language teacher.

As for the future of foreign language enrolments in this particular secondary school, reactions were mixed. As long as a foreign language was promoted as an enjoyable subject, it was felt that enrolment levels could be maintained at their present, relatively healthy level. Japanese was seen as becoming more relevant and a more viable career subject, with French suffering a decline as a result of this.

* The purposes for which we use language, e.g. apologising, requesting.

STUDY NO. 2 A medium-sized metropolitan all boys Catholic secondary school in far north Queensland – *Italian*

PROCEDURES USED

Three and one-half days were spent in the school during the last days of August and the beginning of September 1982. On the first day, an informal session was conducted with the Italian subject master who proceeded to arrange the interview sessions for the case study. Following this, three members of the evaluation team interviewed the principal.

After the principal's interview, two members of the evaluation team chatted informally with the subject master, while the third member of the team carried out the first class interview. On the same day, a class observation was also conducted by the three team members.

For the remaining two and one-half days, one member of the team stayed in the school in order to conduct the other interviews and observations. These were: two further class interviews; four teacher interviews (including the subject master); and another class observation. These were carried out during the one-hour periods, at lunch and after school. Some time was spent in the library talking to the staff and looking at resources so that a brief description of library and audio-visual resources for Italian could be compiled.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE SCHOOL

School profile

The school in this case study had, in 1982, a total population of almost 700 boys, of whom about 220 were boarders.

	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	TOTAL
1982	163	168	139	120	81	671

Over 30 per cent of the school population is generally of Italian extraction, with a small percentage of Torres Strait Islanders and Yugoslavs. While the Anglo-Saxon population is generally drawn from the local community, the majority of Italian boys come from the farming districts around the metropolitan centre.

Foreign language background and organisation

Italian is the only foreign language available in the school. French and Latin were also taught in previous years but both were phased out and only Italian was maintained. Italian has been in the school since 1964, but was initially available only to Year 10 level and was not offered as an internal school subject. It has been offered since 1976 internally to Year 12. The school (Phase II ROSBA) was preparing for the implementation of the new ROSBA trial syllabus in Italian at the time of our visit.

The study of Italian is compulsory in Year 8. The school policy regarding most subjects, including Italian, in Years 9 and 10 is a reasonably flexible one. At the beginning of Year 9, each student is asked to give his preferences, although English, mathematics and science are compulsory subjects. Subjects are then put into a line system in such a way as to maximise the satisfaction of students' original choices. As a result, Italian can be taken in one of two ways. It can be chosen in a purely academic stream, in which the language is offered as a set core subject. In addition to this, the timetable devised in 1982 accommodated the desire to do Italian by students in technical and other streams. For this reason, there were two Year 9 Italian classes in 1982, each composed of boys from contrasting subject backgrounds.

A smorgasbord approach is adopted at the beginning of Year 11 when all students are asked to give their subject preferences. The choice extends across 17 subjects: English; Italian; maths I; maths II; social maths; history; geography; economics; accounting; art; geometrical drawing and perspective; trade drawing; physics; chemistry; biology; earth science; and multistrand science. Subjects are then put on lines as for Year 9.

It was pointed out that mathematics was difficult to avoid and while in 1982, history/geometrical drawing and perspective, and earth science/multistrand science were mutually exclusive, all other subject combinations which arose were accommodated in the timetable. Student choice resulted in Italian being timetabled against trade drawing, physics, biology and English.*

Language choice

The school principal, who had only been at the school since the 1st semester 1982, regarded foreign languages as an important part of the school curriculum, and believed that a foreign language should be taught in every school. He drew attention to the fact that Italian was the obvious choice for their school because of the cultural background of many of the boys.

The school's favourable attitude to Italian was also reflected in the manner in which the timetable allowed every student to choose Italian after Year 8, irrespective of their other subject choices. All the teachers interviewed agreed that since the needs of each Year 9 and Year 11 population were accommodated as much as possible, enrolment levels in Italian reflected the optimum demand for the language. Furthermore, it was felt that enrolments in foreign languages would not be increased if more than one foreign language were offered.

Nonetheless, the principal and two of the language teachers believed that, given the ideal situation, an alternative to Italian could be offered, such as an Asian language. Because of Australia's proximity to, and its trade and tourism links with Asia, an Asian language was regarded as being equally relevant as Italian. One teacher thought that French or even German could be offered, if there were teachers in the school who were capable of teaching these languages. The principal appeared interested in introducing an Aboriginal language or Pidgin English, as an introduction to Aboriginal, Papua New Guinean or Islander cultures. The Italian subject master did not agree with this point of view. Since the school was a boys school, where the interest was more towards mathematics/science and technical subjects, he felt that there would not be sufficient interest in another foreign language. He based his claim on the level of enrolments in Italian (in the senior school – 11 in Year 11 and 10 in Year 12) which was regarded as a relevant language in the region, and pointed out that he suspected there would not be very many boys who would choose an additional language or just another foreign language instead of Italian, especially after Year 10. The principal explained that the school tried to cater for some of the needs of the Italian parents by sending out a newsletter written partly in Italian. Report cards too were written in both Italian and English.

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* English, physics and biology appeared more than once in the timetable.

The availability of Italian in the school depended essentially on the availability of teachers with an adequate level of knowledge of the language. For example, the arrival of the present subject master resulted in the introduction of Italian as an internal school subject to senior level from 1976 onwards. In 1982, two teachers who had never taught Italian and who had only done the subject up to junior and senior level respectively, were asked to teach Italian in Year 8 because of the increased demand for the subject at that level. Both felt confident to teach at that level, and the teacher who had done Italian to senior said she could teach it up to Year 9 but not beyond.

Student demand for a subject was also an important criterion for the availability of a particular subject in the curriculum. For Italian, it was pointed out that classes as small as six were allowed. One teacher felt that if numbers were lower, and if students felt strongly about the subject, they would be given time to take the subject internally, by correspondence, for example.

From 1983, boys entering Year 8 from the primary school attached to the secondary school, will have already done Italian in Year 7.

Library and audio-visual resources

The Italian language section of the library contained traditional grammar books, several books on basic conversational Italian, and a set of two books, written in Italian, for learners of Italian as a foreign language. There were also a dictionary and a set of four books with colour drawings on verbs, adjectives, antonyms and general vocabulary. These seemed to be designed for Italian children learning their mother tongue.

The literature section had a small range of poetry and traditional Italian prose of an advanced level. Some lighter literature was also available, e.g. a few books in Italian based on the cartoon character, Asterix, and a series of simple Italian readers.

The majority of the books in the Italian history section were accounts dealing with Mussolini. There was a well stocked geography section with a large range of books, pamphlets and brochures on Italy. Two series on the regions of Italy were available, one written completely in Italian. Another two sets of books were based on countries of the world, in which Italy was also featured.

Video equipment was available in the library and two Italian programs, *Avventura* and *Appuntamento*, had been recorded. The audio-visual section of the library also had two kits (containing cassettes, slides, transparencies and a teachers handbook) on Italy, its culture, people and food. A multicultural kit had been acquired which contained a series of 17 family case studies, one of them Italian, and which included booklets and photographs about each family, as well as a cassette of some vocabulary items in each of the 17 language groups represented. There was also available in the audio-visual section, a set of Italian picture books with vocabulary on various topics.

The range of materials for Italian on cassettes was fairly limited. Only one series of lessons, Enjoy Italian, was available. The librarian explained that an attempt had been made to record an ABC Italian broadcast, but reception and tape reproduction were so poor that the recording sessions were discontinued. Tape recorders and individual slide projectors could be borrowed for classroom and individual use.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

In the present case study, the school principal and four teachers of Italian were interviewed separately each for an hour or more. The four teachers were the Italian subject master who taught Years 10 and 12; and a female teacher of Italian who had been at the school for three years, who taught Years 9 and 11 and who was bilingual in Italian and English. In addition, the Year 8 Italian teachers, one male, one female, were interviewed. Their main subject was not Italian and they had only this year (1982) begun taking Italian classes.

Three classes of Italian students were interviewed separately — one Year 9 group (31 present); the Year 11 class (11 present); and the Year 12 class (seven present out of the usual 10). The boys in all three groups were eager to contribute their comments during the interviews, although in the larger group of Year 9 students, about half the class was actively participating.

Reasons for studying foreign languages and general views about foreign language learning

The subject master and the Years 9 and 11 Italian teacher both agreed that for the students in this particular region, learning Italian was certain to improve their employment prospects since a high proportion of the people in the communities in the region were largely speakers of Italian. Another benefit that was to be derived from learning Italian as opposed to any other foreign language, was the maintenance of the ethnic origins of the Italian boys. The subject master believed there was a psychological benefit involved for these Italian boys learning Italian because it helped them realise that an Italian cultural background was as valid as a British one, and this helped to make them feel like full members of the community.

For the non-Italian boys, the learning of Italian contributed to the broadening of their horizons, the promotion of tolerance for people from different ethnic origins and an appreciation of another culture. One teacher added that this, in turn, led to an appreciation of their own Australian culture. Similar sentiments were expressed by the principal.

The study of Italian is compulsory in Year 8. There is no longer any school policy which exempts students in Year 8 from doing Italian. The subject master indicated that before his arrival at the school, the least able students were put into a separate class for extra mathematics and remedial English lessons, instead of Italian. However, these were mostly boys from Italian backgrounds whom he believed should not be deprived of the opportunity to learn about their parents' language and culture at school. Now, only very extreme cases are exempted and usually those students in Year 8 who are diagnosed as having slight literacy problems do Italian, but are given remedial English lessons as well. When this change in policy occurred, there was very little opposition from the parents.

The subject master added that he would advise only those boys who were really not interested at all in the language not to take the subject. However, if a student liked the subject in Year 8 he would advise him to try it again, even if the student had not done well in Italian. Another teacher thought that some students should be made to do a cultural component in Year 8 if they did not have the aptitude to cope with the language work. Another teacher again, in contrast to this, could not see any reason for any student being exempt from foreign language study. However, all four teachers agreed that the study of a foreign language should be compulsory at least in Year 8, with one teacher suggesting that compulsory foreign language study should begin in primary school and could continue even into Year 9.

Three of the four teachers maintained that foreign language study should be compulsory at the level(s) indicated above because it contributed towards providing students with a general introduction into the secondary curriculum and gave them a basis for choice and preference of subjects in later years. This view was also held by the principal. The fourth teacher believed that foreign languages should be compulsory, as long as they were culture/people oriented and not just language oriented.

It was generally agreed that foreign language study should be optional after Year 8 (and in one case Year 9) because after one year of language study, students should be given the choice to continue or not, based on their aptitude, preferences and personal interest.

The Year 9s and Year 11s said that one reason for studying Italian was related to the employment advantages expected for people who spoke the language, since the region had a high proportion of Italian migrants living there. The Year 11s and Year 12s suggested that it was an interesting subject which allowed them to find out about another culture and people (not all the boys had an Italian background). The Year 9 group thought it was 'educational'. One Year 11 boy said he had chosen Italian because it was 'different', while a Year 12 student said he thought Italian was a 'bludge' compared to the mathematics and science subjects he was doing. The entire Year 12 group seemed to agree that this was the case.

Both the Year 11 and Year 12 students were generally satisfied with the one language offered in the school, thereby supporting the views expressed by most of the teachers on the same issue. The Year 9 reaction to the question of language choice was mixed. Some boys suggested French or German, but gave no reason for this choice. One boy thought Japanese would be relevant because of Australia's links with Japan which he described as the 'workshop of Asia'. However, these suggestions were not supported by the majority of the group.

When asked to describe the 'ideal foreign language student', the views of the groups were similar. A successful foreign language student was seen as a studious, intelligent person with a good memory, and preferably with an Italian background. However, one Year 11 boy suggested 'either you've got it or you haven't' and a Year 9 student thought it helped to have a good teacher.

The students were asked to isolate any factors which tended to make foreign language learning more difficult or less successful than other subjects. More than 50 per cent of the Year 9 group thought Italian was more difficult than their other subjects. The reasons for this included lack of resources, not having an Italian background, starting the subject from scratch (as opposed to most other subjects started in primary school), and infrequent opportunities to use and practise the language. In contrast to this, the Year 11s and Year 12s generally thought that Italian was one of their easiest subjects, one in which they could get a rating of 4 with a minimum amount of work.

The advantages associated with the study of Italian were closely related to the reasons given before, for choosing to study the language — these included improved job prospects (Years 9, 11, 12); usefulness for future travel (Years 11 and 12); ease in obtaining good results, and the belief that this contributed to a better TE score (Year 11); and an aid to the understanding of English (Year 9).

The groups were asked to give their views on the suitability of foreign language study to boys and girls. Some of the Year 11 and Year 12 boys suspected that girls were more successful at foreign languages than boys and both the Year 9s and Year 11s suggested that having girls in the same classroom would lead to more conversation and greater use of the language generally. One Year 11 boy remarked that the presence of girls would be an advantage since he believed it would tend to create a more competitive atmosphere in the class and motivate them to work harder.

Teachers' perceptions of the attitudes of others towards foreign language study

The teachers' perceptions of parents' attitudes towards foreign languages were mixed. The subject master believed that the parents of those boys who chose to continue foreign language study in Year 9 approved of their children's choice. However, he saw this approval as being specifically related to Italian rather than to languages in general, since the majority of boys who pursued the subject tended to have Italian backgrounds. Their parents therefore saw the practical value of learning Italian, e.g. being able to write and talk to relatives. Another teacher agreed, and pointed out that those parents felt a certain pride and feeling of continuity of their culture when their children chose to continue with Italian. It was thought that the bulk of parents whose children dropped Italian after Year 8 tended to be anti-foreign-language because of some prejudice against non-Anglo-Saxon cultures, or simply because they considered that other subjects were more useful and relevant for their sons. This view was supported by the comments of one of the Year 8 Italian teachers who thought that most parents didn't care about Italian, because in her experience with parents during interviews with them, they tended to inquire about English and mathematics rather than Italian.

The other Year 8 teacher, however, thought that on the whole, parents were favourable towards foreign languages. He admitted to never having spoken to parents about this, but said he had not heard any comments to contradict his impressions.

The teachers were asked to give their views on what they believed to be the students' attitudes to foreign languages as a subject. It was suggested that in the lower levels, especially Year 8, the students' views varied: foreign languages were either a novelty and a challenge, or difficult, boring and a drag, particularly for the less bright children. In the upper secondary levels, two teachers thought that attitudes to foreign language study resulted from a mixture of parental influence, personal aptitude and the perceived usefulness of a language after school. The subject master thought that a student's attitude was also influenced by the teacher's approach and the quality of the lessons.

The teachers were asked to give their perceptions of the students' attitudes to lessons and homework in Italian. The teacher who taught Year 9s and Year 11s was of the opinion that some students who continued Italian beyond Year 8 were often disillusioned because of the more structured and formal approach of the lessons (compared to the more 'fun' approach adopted in Year 8) and the increased homework load (homework is compulsory in every subject). One of the Year 8 teachers believed that many students did not treat homework in Italian seriously because it was not regarded as a core subject like mathematics, science or English. The subject master also noticed a certain lax attitude towards homework on the part of the students, which he attributed partly to the long breaks between Italian lessons, and partly to the low priority given to the subject generally. However, he had devised a system of bonus marks for assignments handed in early or on time, and if certain homework was not done, he at least expected the boys to record the answers when the homework was corrected in class.

The teachers were then asked if they thought their students felt they were getting somewhere in their lessons. The two Year 8 teachers, as well as the Years 9 and 11 teacher believed that their students could see themselves progressing, even the less bright students, although one Year 8 teacher claimed that progress in Italian was slower than in other subjects. The subject master's view differed in that he believed that, at the beginning, many students couldn't see themselves progressing. This view was confirmed to some extent by the comments made by the Year 9 students who did not feel confident generally, and in particular were doubtful of their ability to use Italian effectively in an all-Italian environment. However, the subject master added that once the new ROSBA Italian syllabus was implemented, there would be a more immediate satisfaction of students' needs in this respect. By Year 11 and Year 12, he thought that the students developed more inquiring minds and could do 'quite a bit with language'. He believed that those boys with Italian backgrounds brought a certain confidence to what they were doing.

Students' perceptions of the attitudes of others towards foreign language study

When invited to comment on their perceptions of the present guidance officer's or their form teacher's views on foreign languages, none of the boys had had any contact with them on the matter and therefore could not comment on their attitudes towards the subject. The parents of the students in the three classes were perceived as being generally supportive of their choice to do Italian. This support was felt to be strongest amongst the Italian parents, but two boys in Year 12 said that a score of 7 in Italian would not be as impressive to their parents as a 7 in other subjects. The boys also claimed they 'cop a lot of names' from their peers not studying Italian. However, they considered this not to be serious and just done in fun. One Year 11 student pointed out that such 'abuse' was often meted out in Italian remembered from Year 8.

Students' comments about foreign language teachers

When asked to give any negative characteristics of a teacher which would cause them to drop the study of the foreign language, the Year 11 and Year 9 classes cited an inadequate knowledge of the language as a reason. The use of too much advanced Italian or lack of clear explanations by the teacher were two other reasons given by the Year 11s. The Year 12 students said they would not like a teacher who was too strict, and the Year 11s cited a similar negative trait — a teacher who did not interact socially with the group. The Year 12 boys added further possible reasons for dropping their foreign language study -- tedious lessons with too much concentrated work; and not enough variety of activities. The Year 9 students said a teacher who required them to do too much writing would negatively affect their attitude towards him or her.

Alternatively, a good or competent teacher was one who could speak the language well (Years 11, 9); had a knowledge of the culture (Year 12); and was patient and willing to help. The Year 11s further suggested that a good or competent teacher was a person who could combine learning with a light-hearted approach; knew the students' capabilities and limitations and did not stretch them. The Year 9s felt that a good teacher would be someone who was interested in teaching, a person you could respect, who would not treat you 'like a jerk' and who could vary the lessons.

Lessons and related activities

In response to the question regarding the extent to which their teachers explained what work was going to be covered and why, the Year 9 class indicated that their teacher did not present the class with any detailed or general outline of what was going to be covered in a particular unit of work. This was also the case for the Year 11 class, who had the same teacher as the Year 9s. However, the two classes were given an assessment guide each semester. The Year 12 students, taught by the subject master, said they were given an indication of the work to be covered as well as an assessment outline for the semester.

Each group was asked to describe the kinds of activities done in class. The Year 9 boys said they did dictations, read short prose passages and then answered questions based on the stories. They explained that the majority of their activities were geared to reading and writing; there were no group conversations, and assignments were not often done in groups or pairs. They found the general approach boring and repetitive. Only one boy said that he found the activities interesting, except for the occasions when he could not follow. Other boys added that sometimes certain points were not explained properly by their teacher.

The comments from the Year 11s and Year 12s were similar, e.g. there was no group work done. Occasionally, short stories were read and questions answered, but this was usually set as a test. According to the students, only rarely did they listen to taped conversations. They did point out, though, that since the grammar content had been covered for the year, they would soon be seeing *Avventura* as a regular video program.

The Year 11s and Year 12s admitted to having acquired only basic survival skills in Italian and did not feel confident about coping with Italian spoken fast, and with dialectal influences. Both groups thought they would only be able to understand the gist in newspapers. The Year 11 group said they could probably cope with reading signs and the Year 12s believed they had only acquired a Year 5 level reading ability in Italian. Both groups felt they could cope with understanding directions, buying food and handling money. The Year 12s said they could cope with using telephones in Italy. This point of view contrasted sharply with the teachers' perceptions of their students' progress and general level of skill in Italian.

When the three classes were asked what other topics or situations had actually been dealt with in class, the Year 9s mentioned only two topics: telling the time of day; and giving personal details such as one's name. They added, at this point, that they thought they probably would not be understood, and they suspected that the many Italian dialectal influences would be a problem for them. In response to the same question above, the Year 11 and Year 12 boys explained that their teachers' approach was based on a grammatical perspective, which led only incidentally to a situation or topic. They felt this approach was not practical and too formal. The Year 11 class drew attention to the fact that they were coping less successfully with the grammatical approach, compared to the less formal, conversational style they had experienced in the lower levels. The Year 12 group felt that more conversation should be done in class. The Year 11 boys also suggested having an 'Italian room', more Italian films and food, as well as more culture and history.

Activities pertaining to Italian, but held outside normal school time, were also discussed at various times by the teachers interviewed. Boys from the present school were invited each year to join a group of students from other schools on a 36-day trip to Italy. In addition to this, the school and pupils usually supported two local religious festivals (St Alfio and Our Lady of the Chains). The two events were regarded as family, rather than purely school, occasions. The subject master also added that a few years ago an Italian Day was organised in the school. This included an Italian lunch, to which the local consular agent was invited. The meal was cooked by some of the boarders' mothers, who had come to take their sons home on the boarders' free weekend. The dining hall was decorated in the Italian national colours, musical items were played, and grace was said in Italian. Such an occasion had not been organised again, since the teacher responsible was no longer at the school.

About two years ago, a group of Year 10 Italian students went to a series of activities in another city, organised by the local representatives of the Italian club. The aim of the activities was to familiarise the students with the Italian community there. It was felt that such an excursion was beneficial in that it gave the boys the opportunity to meet other students of Italian thereby making them feel less isolated.

Learning environment

As in the previous case study, the students were asked to give a rapid impressionistic assessment of their regular Italian classroom. Each group thought their room was dull, uninspiring and lacking of any 'Italian feeling'. There appeared to be a lack of Italian resources and posters around the rooms. Noise from neighbouring classrooms was not a problem but street and playing field noises were. Each classroom was arranged with the desks in traditional rows, but only the Year 9 group said they preferred a semi-circular or circular arrangement. The Year 12 boys said they often moved around to different desks in the room and the Year 11 students said their teacher did not like them sitting together.

Timetable concerns

Decisions relating to the allocation of teachers to particular year levels in Italian were based on the preferences, competence and confidence of the teachers, as well as their teaching commitments in other subjects. For example, 1982 was the first year that the two Year 8 teachers had taught Italian. Because of their inexperience and limited knowledge of Italian they were content to teach at the lowest level. One of these two teachers pointed out that the attitude and support of the administration contributed to her confidence in branching out into a new subject area, and she maintained this was also the case for the other Year 8 teacher.

The school operated on an eight-day cycle, with four one-hour periods in the junior school, and six one-hour periods per cycle in the senior school for Italian. Three of the four teachers were not happy with the gaps of up to four days (including weekends) between periods. The one-hour periods were also considered to be too long in duration for teachers as well as students. However, the problem seemed to be less acute in Years 11 and 12. One solution to the duration problem was to vary the classroom activities more frequently. One of the Year 8 teachers said she hadn't found the one-hour lessons a problem and thought that the length of contact made up for the infrequency of lessons in the junior school. None of the teachers complained of any major disruption to classroom time because of administrative or other matters not related to the lessons.

Attitudes to the one-hour periods were fairly neutral among the students, although the Year 9 group thought that with such a large class (31), the time was barely adequate for their teacher to devote her attention to each person in the class. Only some of the Year 9 students seemed to think that the long breaks between one Italian lesson and the next were detrimental, in that they tended to forget the work that had been covered in the earlier lessons.

Administrative support

The subject master believed the present principal to be supportive of foreign languages in the school and especially Italian because he saw the availability of this particular language as giving status to a minority group in Australian. The subject master was confident that any reasonable request related to Italian would be considered favourably by the principal, who indicated that funds were derived from an allocation of money each year for the buying of resources, as well as from a $1.50 student levy. Two teachers admitted that they had never approached the principal for Italian resources, but one thought that funds were shared equally among all subjects and that there was no preferential treatment. It was believed that Italian would certainly not suffer compared to other subjects. The Years 9 and 11 teacher explained that normally, requests were directed to the librarian or to the subject master rather than to the principal himself. She said that although she had not often asked for materials to be purchased, no requests had ever been knocked back. She added, however, that she preferred to buy her own resources. Nonetheless, there seemed to be a general feeling among the teachers, especially the Year 8 teachers, that there was a need for more resources in Italian.

All four teachers had been granted time off from school to attend whole-day seminars on teaching techniques and use of resources, and all were of the opinion that any further need to participate in similar activities would be accommodated by the principal. The subject master had never had a request refused and he said that, at most, he would have about four days per year for attending seminars and other activities related to Italian.

Because of the administration's positive reaction to such requests, the teachers concurred that Italian was considered an important subject in the school curriculum. Furthermore, the subject master explained that the guidance officer was also favourable to Italian for a variety of reasons, viz. in terms of the future study careers of the boys, the employment benefits to be derived from knowing the language and simply because of its general educational value.

Teachers' general self-evaluation

Each of the teachers interviewed had either a Diploma in Education or a Bachelor of Education. Only the subject master had done a course in language method (for French) as part of his teacher training. Italian, to a Year 12 standard, was learnt subsequent to his tertiary degree. In addition to this, he had participated in a one-month intensive Italian language course at the University of New South Wales, and had also spent three weeks in Italy. Overall, he felt confident as a language teacher, although he believed his knowledge of French was better than his knowledge of Italian. With regard to his knowledge of Italian culture, he felt he was still learning as much as he was contributing, given the community he lived in, and said he hoped to study in Italy sometime in the future. He admitted, however, that he was in a 'rut' and felt that ROSBA was providing him with the opportune occasion to change.

The Years 9 and 11 teacher had majored in history but since she was bilingual in Italian and English, she had branched out into the teaching of Italian. With her Italian home background, she felt she could adequately impart the cultural aspects of Italian and felt comfortable teaching Italian even though she had trained as a history teacher. Nonetheless, she had never been to Italy and was looking forward to having the opportunity to go there, above all, to improve her language skills.

One of the Year 8 teachers had only done Italian at school, to Year 12 level. Despite this, she felt confident as a teacher of Italian but only to Year 9 level. She was planning a trip to Italy and said she did not have a good background in Italian culture and she needed to improve her speaking and listening skills.

The other Year 8 Italian teacher didn't regard himself as a 'language teacher' — he said he was learning to be one and was enjoying it. He felt his knowledge of Italian language and culture was totally inadequate for any level beyond Year 8, although he felt confident at the Year 8 level, provided he had time for lesson preparation. He had only learnt Italian as a school subject to Year 10, and had trained as a science and maths teacher. He relied heavily on books, slides and other resources for the cultural content of his lessons.

Condition of foreign languages — present and future

Both students and teachers were asked to comment on the decline in foreign language enrolments in Queensland secondary schools. There was agreement on both sides that one major reason for the decline was that most students in the State did not consider foreign languages an important subject, particularly since it had a perceived low employment value.

The subject master and the Year 9 group concurred on another point, viz. that there was a general lack of parental support for foreign languages, which the subject master suspected was related to adult resentment of foreign language study – this, he believed, was associated with bad personal experiences with the subject in their own school days. All four teachers also attributed the decline in enrolments to the abolition of the foreign language requirement for tertiary entrance.

The three student groups unanimously agreed that the decline was, in part, the result of boring lessons, as well as failure to succeed in the subject. One teacher suggested that it was the popular belief amongst teachers that the TE score was disadvantaged by foreign languages – this was not the view expressed by the Year 11 group on this issue. A further reason posited by the Year 12s and Year 9s for the decline, was that English was regarded as a universal language by many students, who consequently could see no reason in studying a foreign language.

The subject master believed that foreign language teachers were going through a morale crisis which could be affecting their attitudes, as well as their teaching. He added that in their particular school, however, enrolments in Italian had improved. Nonetheless, he felt that the cyclic timetable used in the school was leaving students dissatisfied and that courses such as the Career Training Certificate and the greater choice in subjects geared to less able children could be taking away enrolments from foreign languages.

In terms of maintaining or improving enrolments in Italian in the present school, the subject master suggested revamping the Years 9 and 10 course to make the study of Italian a more satisfying experience for the students. One of the Year 8 teachers suggested infusing more culture, excursions and activities of a practical nature into the Year 8 course but pointed out that the constraints of the old syllabus did not allow the time for such extras. The other Year 8 teacher suggested inviting Italians into the class for conversation with the students. This was one of the ideas proposed by the Year 9 class – at the same time, their teacher did not support this proposal because she feared that such visitors would probably not speak standard Italian or would perhaps not be able to handle a classroom situation. Another idea put forward by the subject master, aimed at maintaining interest in Italian, was to make a collage of job advertisements requiring language skills in the applicants. This, he thought would point out to the students that there was a practical advantage in knowing a foreign language.

The Years 9 and 11 teacher indicated that enrolments in Italian had been increasing. However, she felt that if numbers were to drop suddenly, she would assess her teaching in an attempt to locate the cause of the decline. She added that since Italian was not the only subject she taught, her concern for that subject was no greater than for other subjects.

Under the given circumstances, it was felt that the school was doing what it could to support Italian and that essentially, it was up to teachers themselves to approach the administration for things they regarded as essential. All the Italian teachers thought there was a need for more resources, although as the Years 9 and 11 teacher explained, the library resources that were already available, were good. Nonetheless, there was still room for improvement. The subject master sensed that there was an openness and willingness on the part of the administration to support the teachers.

Only the subject master and the Years 9 and 11 teacher had had any contact or association with the MLTAQ and both said that while the association was performing adequately in Brisbane, its effects were not felt in the far north and there was no local branch. The subject master explained that on the few occasions when seminars had been arranged in their city by the Brisbane MLTAQ, support was not strong from the local teachers because the activities were usually organised over weekends. This year, weekdays were 'full with ROSBA' and teachers were feeling they had already been neglecting their classes too much.

The subject master believed that one role of the syllabus committees could be to help collect resources, aid in the interpretation of the new syllabuses, and provide teachers with demonstrations of complete lessons, based on the functional/notional approach. He said that the new syllabus for Italian looked promising but teachers needed help and encouragement. On the whole, he was 'glad of ROSBA' and felt that it would force him to rethink about goals, methods and priorities. At the same time, however, he felt overwhelmed and threatened by the task of writing work programs (the school was Phase II ROSBA).

The Years 9 and 11 teacher said the new ROSBA syllabus would make Italian more interesting to teach and learn, with the emphasis being on practical rather than theoretical learning. Both she and the subject master believed that in Year 8 the teaching approach was already functionally-oriented.

The two Year 8 teachers had not seen the new syllabus and had not been involved in the initial stages of its implementation. However, one of them, who had seen the biology syllabus, could foresee problems arising, associated with the comparability of standards between schools.

The subject master believed that new teacher graduates were better equipped to teach foreign languages than their predecessors. At the same time, the Year 9 and 11 teacher thought that there was a general lack of expertise and competent Italian teachers in the field. She felt that there was a need for courses which enabled teachers to reach the highest possible level of skill in the use of the foreign language, and not just in their teaching strategies. The subject master suggested that there should be some form of ongoing training for foreign language teachers — he felt that one-day seminars were not good in that teachers had the chance to only 'slightly digest' ideas.

When asked to comment, finally, on the future of foreign languages and enrolments in the State, the two Year 8 teachers said they were not aware of the trends and could not put forward an opinion on the matter. The subject master anticipated that there would be a change from what some people regarded as irrelevant languages to relevant ones, especially community languages, as was already happening in their region with the growing popularity of Italian. He thought that people were going to look for the relevant outcomes of foreign language learning — communication, functioning in society generally — and thus there would be a swing to community languages. The Years 9 and 11 teacher believed that European languages would become less relevant and that, perhaps, Asian languages would increase in popularity. Moreover, since society was becoming more job-oriented, any language, or for that matter, any school subject, would have to be regarded as a valid career subject in order for it to survive. She felt that, on the whole, foreign languages were seen as useless, in a society that was preoccupied with unemployment.

STUDY NO. 3 A large metropolitan State high school in south-east Queensland – *Japanese*

PROCEDURES USED

A total of three and one-half days was spent in the present school. Visits were arranged to the school over a period of three days during the second last week of August 1982, and then a further half-day was spent in the school during the second week of September. This was necessary because of the absence of the subject mistress during the initial three days. Two and one-half days were spent in the school by two members of an evaluation team, while one day was spent there by one member alone.

During that time, the acting principal, the subject mistress, the Japanese teacher and a district relieving teacher (who taught Japanese) were interviewed during spare periods and lunchtime. Two Japanese classes were interviewed during a normal language period. Two class observations were also arranged. A brief survey of library and audio-visual resources for Japanese was also carried out during the visit.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE SCHOOL

School profile

The total population for the present school was about 1120 in 1982. At the time of the visit, the school had an unusually high proportion of children with a Spanish speaking background (about 25 students). It also had the usual mixture of students with a variety of European home backgrounds, as well as up to 15 children from Singapore.

	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	TOTAL
1982	285	291	275	163	113	1127

Foreign language background and organisation

The school offered three foreign languages, viz. French, German and Japanese. In 1982, each of these was done for one-third of the school year in Year 8 and all three were compulsory subjects at that level. From Year 9 onwards, the three languages were optional and were timetabled against each other, so that only one of the three languages could be taken by any one student through to Year 12. In Years 9 and 10, the three languages were timetabled against art and health and physical education in three Level 1 courses (general, technical and commerical), and against art only on the home economics stream, which was also a Level 1 course. Foreign languages were not available in any of the Level 2 courses. Below is a full description of the courses in which French, German and Japanese appear for the Year 9 and Year 10 students.

(i) General Course:
  (a) English
  (b) *French/German/Japanese/art/health and physical education*
  (c) advanced/ordinary maths
  (d) science
  (e) history/technical drawing
  (f) geography/music

(ii) Technical 1 Course:
  (a) English
  (b) *French/German/Japanese/art/health and physical education*
  (c) advanced/ordinary maths
  (d) science
  (e) technical drawing
  (f) shop A (woodwork)/shop B (metalwork)

(iii) Commercial 1 Course:
  (a) English
  (b) *French/German/Japanese/art/health and physical education*
  (c) advanced/ordinary maths
  (d) shorthand
  (e) typewriting
  (f) business principles
  (g) geography/music

(iv) Home Economics Course:
  (a) English
  (b) *French/German/Japanese/art*
  (c) advanced/ordinary maths
  (d) science
  (e) home economics
  (f) geography/music

In Years 11 and 12 the three foreign languages were offered against biology, earth sciences, and geometrical drawing and perspective. The school also offered a special 12-month Year 11 course, not leading to further qualifications, but which offered work experience in industry for three fortnights during the year.

Enrolments in Japanese had been relatively stable over the past three years, although they were the lowest out of the three languages in 1982. The Year 11 Japanese class had to be combined with the Year 9 group in 1981 because of low enrolments. The same two cohorts of Japanese students were again combined in 1982 as a Years 10 and 12 group. This was also the case for French, but no two classes in German had ever been combined.

There appeared to be no explicit policy in the school to exclude any particular children from doing the compulsory Year 8 foreign language subjects, although the subject mistress suspected that the principal thought that foreign language study was only for 'special' children.

The subject mistress thought that the manner in which the foreign languages had been timetabled adversely affected potential enrolments. For example, she considered it was unfair to have three languages timetabled simultaneously with two other subjects (in Years 9 and 10), while other subjects were timetabled against only one other subject. She felt that both art, and health and physical education deprived foreign languages of enrolments. In contrast to this, the acting principal said he did not think that biology, for example, was taking away enrolments in Years 11 and 12 as was commonly believed. He pointed out that biology was offered against other options on another line of subject choices in the timetable anyway. The Japanese teacher suspected that the three languages were made mutually exclusive in order not to overload the timetable with too many subjects from the same area. Furthermore, he did not think that there would be too many students wanting to study more than one foreign language. The district relieving teacher maintained that the manner in which foreign languages were timetabled probably reduced the number of science-oriented students doing French, German or Japanese.

Language choice

The acting principal explained that the three foreign languages offered in the school were 'a matter of history' and he added that he could not give any specific reason why those three particular languages had been chosen. If given the choice, he said that he would drop French from the curriculum because he felt that two languages were adequate. He believed that a total abolition of foreign languages should never be allowed to occur, but pointed out that low enrolments could not be economically tolerated. He said that, personally, he was totally committed to foreign languages although he himself was monolingual in English.

The subject mistress was happy with the three foreign languages available in the school and thought that Australia's culture was more related to Europe despite our proximity to Asia. Given the ideal situation for language choice in the school curriculum, she would still opt for offering an extra European language. This was not the view of the school's main Japanese teacher who believed that two Asian languages (e.g. Japanese and Chinese) and only one European language, were more suited to the needs of Australian students. He explained that French was commonly taught simply because it was traditional, although, if given the choice, he would choose German. He gave no reason for this choice other than a personal preference for that European language. The district relieving teacher agreed with the choice of languages in the school, but added that Vietnamese, Italian or Greek would also be relevant languages given the composition of Australia's migrant intake.

Library and audio-visual resources

The language section of the library was mostly stocked with traditional grammar books. A 17-volume Japanese dictionary had been donated to the school by the Japanese Consulate but had never been used because it was considered to be too difficult. A set of basic Japanese readers was also available in the Japanese language section, which was considerably smaller than the French language section.

In the literature section, there were Japanese novels (some of which appeared in their English translated form), poetry and modern short stories. Included in this section was also a small series of Japanese guidebooks, written in Japanese.

In the economic history section, a very small number of books were available — one of these presented a comparison of Australian and Japanese economic history. The history section was comparatively well stocked with a good range of historical and cultural surveys. The geography section also contained books which were more geared to the people and culture of Japan, rather than purely geographical surveys.

In the audio-visual section of the library, no programs were available on video for Japanese, although video recording equipment was available for use. On sound cassette, there were some radio broadcasts (from 1973) as well as songs, folktales, cultural programs and recordings of Japanese phone numbers. The tapes which accompanied the prescribed Japanese textbook, *Alfonso I* and *II*, were also housed in the audio-visual section of the library. It was pointed out that these were not often used. An intensive Japanese language course had been copied on tape but there was no accompanying handbook. Another complete set of tapes and books on elementary Japanese was also kept in the audio-visual room. There was also a kit of filmstrips, maps, photographs and cassettes on Japanese family life. In addition to this, there was a series of slides and tapes on cultural, historical, rural and home life in Japan. This latter kit had been used frequently.

The other kits could be borrowed by students – one was geared to the learning of Japanese characters and the other was a series of books also designed to aid the acquisition of Japanese characters.

Tape recorders and individual and class size slide projectors could also be borrowed. Each school block had one or two overhead projectors, while some blocks had slide projectors in addition to those kept in the library.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

The acting principal and three teachers were interviewed separately – the main Japanese teacher, the subject mistress (whose major languages were French and German) and the district relieving teacher (who had just been given her first class – Year 8 – in Japanese at the time of the interview). Each was invited to give his/her comments and views on a range of ideas pertaining to foreign languages and foreign language study.

Two classes of Japanese students were interviewed, one from the lower and another from the upper school. Six females and three males were present out of the usual Year 9 class of 10. The total enrolment in Year 12 was four (all females). This class was normally combined with the Year 10 Japanese group for their lessons. In the Year 9 class, the boys were as vocal as the girls and most of the students had something to contribute during the interview.

Reasons for studying foreign languages and general views about foreign language learning

The teachers were asked to consider the possible benefits gained by the study of a foreign language. The subject mistress explained that in a country such as Australia which was regarded, she believed, as a 'very monolingual' one, children needed to do some foreign language study as a means of broadening their minds. The two other teachers agreed that foreign language study gave students an appreciation of other cultures and promoted an awareness or tolerance of people from different ethnic origins. It was also suggested that foreign languages were essential for a complete education, they improved one's knowledge of English, and were useful for future travel. Japanese was seen as being particularly relevant given Australia's trade links with Japan. The acting principal's views concurred with those expressed by the language teachers.

Although the school policy was to make foreign languages compulsory for all students at the Year 8 level, the subject mistress said that some people would prefer to exempt those children of less than average ability. Although she did not agree with this point of view, she conceded that she would support such a policy only if the student had a very poor command of his/her mother tongue. The Japanese teacher believed that if a student did have poor literacy skills, this would have a negative effect in all academic areas for that student. This, he felt, would result in that student leaving school with a poor general education. In this case, then, he believed that the study of a foreign language should be recommended since it would provide one means of enriching the student's otherwise poor educational experience. He qualified this by remarking that the student's English should not be neglected and neither should such a student be expected to achieve complete literacy and fluency in the foreign language. He was of the opinion that the aim of foreign language study for this type of student would be simply to evoke an interest in the subject. However, the district relieving teacher maintained that foreign languages should not be forced onto students who had problems with their mother tongue. Such children should have remedial English lessons instead of foreign language classes.

With regard to the status of foreign languages in the school, both the subject mistress and the Japanese teacher thought that they should be made compulsory from Year 8 to Year 10. They both agreed that the study of a foreign language should go further than the low level of acquisition expected in Year 8. The subject mistress explained that although an attempt was made to give the students a worthwhile course in Year 8, in both language and culture, it was nonetheless limited. The Japanese teacher believed it was a watered-down scheme in Year 8 that did not provide any in-depth exposure to any of the three languages taught. Because of this, he had the impression that when the students were faced with a decision at the end of Year 8, whether to continue or not, the choice was a difficult one. Moreover, he felt that because of the manner in which foreign languages were offered in the school, i.e. the three-in-one-year approach for Year 8, the subject was rendered trivial in the eyes of the students. For this reason, it was not taken seriously and therefore dropped at the end of Year 8. The Japanese teacher further believed that some bright students were failing precisely because of the low priority given to the subject.

The subject mistress suggested that if foreign languages were to be made compulsory up to Year 10, a syllabus would be needed which catered for different abilities. She referred to the syllabus used in New South Wales which incorporated more than one level. Such a syllabus catered to the student who could not cope with 'high level' language. She further specified that it was necessary for foreign languages to be optional in the senior school because students developed definite preferences by then, which were influenced by study and career prospects. She also claimed that the workload in Years 11 and 12 was large and therefore students tended to do only the subjects which were going to be immediately necessary or useful for their future study and careers.

Neither the acting principal nor the district relieving teacher believed that foreign languages should be compulsory at any level. The district relieving teacher thought that foreign language study should be decided on academic ability (a view which was opposed by the Japanese teacher and subject mistress). The acting principal's argument was based on the claim that if foreign languages were introduced earlier in the curriculum at primary school, the successful students would want to continue. This would negate the need to make the subject compulsory at any secondary school level. He believed that there was the possibility at the primary level to manipulate such a curriculum change.

When asked why they were studying Japanese, some of the reasons posited by the two student groups included future employment prospects because of expanding trade with, and tourism from, Japan. Another reason given by the Year 12 group was success in the language in earlier years and a liking for a particular teacher in Year 8 and Year 9.

In explaining their choice of Japanese instead of German and French, the Year 9 group cited the geographical proximity of Japan and its trade links with Australia as reasons for the choice. One girl thought that Japanese was a challenge; on the other hand, another girl had chosen Japanese because she thought French and German were more difficult. Another reason given by some of the Year 9 students was that French and German had not been as interesting in Year 8 as Japanese had been.

The Year 12 students cited as reasons, lack of success in the other two foreign languages, more interesting and enjoyable classes and a nicer teacher in Japanese. They also suggested that Japanese was a more useful language in an Australian context.

The advantages associated with knowing a foreign language were almost totally related to future career and travel prospects. One student in Year 9 also suggested that a foreign language helped one obtain a better TE score. The students' 'utilitarian' benefits associated with foreign language study contrasted with the more 'educational' benefits to be gained, as suggested by the teachers.

Some of the factors which the students said contributed to making foreign language learning more difficult than other school subjects were related specifically to Japanese rather than foreign languages in general. The Year 12 group maintained that the Japanese characters and unusual sentence construction made Japanese a difficult language to learn. However, a more general problem seemed to be that learning a foreign language involved the acquisition of the tools by which information or content was also acquired. In other subjects, only the acquisition of information was usually involved. One Year 9 girl said that foreign language learning was a cumulative process so that once something was learnt it was not easily forgotten.

Both classes believed that the study of a foreign language was suited to both males and females. The Year 9s even suggested that the class be split into male/female groups to facilitate the acquisition of certain vocabulary items appropriate to their sex — this appeared to be a feature of Japanese. The four Year 12 Japanese students explained the absence of males in foreign language subjects in the upper school by the fact that they thought many boys left school at an earlier age than girls.

The two groups were asked to give their views on the ideal foreign language student. According to the Year 9s, this person was a studious, inquisitive, intelligent, attentive, interested and keen student. The Year 12 group gave a less detailed description and simply suggested that the ideal foreign language student would have to have a good memory.

Teachers' perceptions of the attitudes of others towards foreign language study

When the teachers were asked to give their perceptions of the attitudes of parents towards foreign languages, the subject mistress said that parents traditionally thought that foreign languages were useless for their children. The district relieving teacher expressed the same view and further suggested that parents rated subjects according to their future career usefulness. However, the subject mistress added that on P & C nights, many parents commented that students should be made to do more than one language. The Japanese teacher had also had positive discussions with some of the parents of his Japanese students. However, the subject mistress commented that the parents who were interested enough to talk to teachers were usually the supportive ones and she suspected that those parents with negative attitudes did not bother to air their views.

The teachers' perceptions of the students' attitudes to foreign languages and their lessons varied according to the year level referred to. In addition to this there did not seem to be total agreement amongst the teachers as to the attitudes of each particular year level. For example, the subject mistress believed that in Year 8, foreign languages were regarded as a novelty by the students, but after gaining familiarity with the subject, their attitude became a neutral one, i.e. foreign languages were regarded as just another subject in the curriculum. The district relieving teacher thought that foreign languages were regarded as useless and irrelevant subjects by most students at any level — she felt that most of them wanted to do subjects directly related to careers, and French, German or Japanese were not appropriate subjects. However, this remark did not comply entirely with the views of the two classes interviewed, who claimed that they were studying Japanese because of its relevance to future career and employment.

Students' perceptions of the attitudes of others towards foreign language study

Both groups were asked to comment on their perceptions of the attitudes towards foreign languages of certain people.

Since the guidance officer was new this year, neither group could say whether her attitude was positive or negative. However, one girl in Year 9 said that the previous guidance officer had told her that Japanese was a wise choice. Of the three form teachers represented in the Year 12 group, two had expressed a liking for French.

The Year 9 group believed that their own parents were, on the whole, supportive of their choice because they regarded Japanese as a useful language with respect to future employment and travel. This view was partly upheld by the teachers who had said that a minority of parents had a positive attitude towards foreign language study. One Year 12 girl said that her parents loved languages, wholeheartedly supported her choice and even bought her a cassette and book of Japanese lessons (which she hadn't used). Two other Year 12 girls thought their parents considered Japanese a useful language, while the fourth girl could not comment on the views of her parents.

The Year 9 students said that their peers not taking a foreign language thought the subject was 'yuk' and said they got the idea 'Nips — just a Wog's language'. One boy said that his peers believed foreigners should learn English. One boy suggested that health and physical education was considered to be more fun than foreign languages. The Year 12 girls said that their non-foreign-language peers thought that foreign languages (i.e. Japanese) were difficult and that Japanese writing 'scares them'. They said, however, that such views were probably due to their ignorance of the language.

Students' comments about foreign language teachers

The students were asked to give their views on what they considered to be a good or competent teacher. The Year 12s said the teacher would have a good personality, would give interesting lessons; he/she would enjoy teaching and would be prepared to help students with problems. In addition to this, he/she would have to speak the language well, and would know how to integrate language with culture in the lessons. The Year 9 students said that a good teacher would be strict but could still take a joke. He/she would be able to tolerate mistakes and would not embarrass them in class.

Lessons and related activities

The Japanese teacher believed that the old syllabus posed a problem — its prescriptive nature tied teachers too much to the textbook and did not allow them the freedom to deviate from the book. He suspected this was not a good situation for the students because they were getting bored — this, he said, tended to kill interest in the subject. However, he felt that this was partly due to his own lack of confidence and his dependence on the book, two factors which were both related to what he considered his inadequate knowledge of the Japanese language. Another negative factor was the combination of the Year 12 class with the Year 10s. This had resulted in a reduction of contact time for each class and also contributed to the students' boredom — when he was teaching one group, the others had to be set written exercises to keep them occupied. However, he said that he was trying to do more oral work in all his classes.

The district relieving teacher also had the impression that students became bored with the repetitive nature of foreign language learning. She felt they became more inhibited with oral work as they became older and that when the work became too difficult (even in Year 8) they convinced themselves they did not want to continue with the subject.

It is interesting to note that most of the Year 9 group said that they enjoyed their Japanese lessons more than their lessons in other subjects because Japanese provided them with a break from subjects they had done since primary school. In contrast to this, two of the Year 12 girls thought their Japanese lessons were just as enjoyable as their other subjects, while the other two girls found their Japanese lessons less enjoyable.

Not much homework was set in Japanese, but the main Japanese teacher suspected that the small amounts that were given were not being done. On the other hand, the subject mistress' experience with French and German pupils was more positive. She thought they were generally good at doing their homework and added that she believed that homework in all subjects was given the same priority.

The teachers were asked to comment on whether they thought their students were progressing or not in their foreign language study. The Japanese teacher felt that the Year 12s were becoming conscious of their lack of flexibility with the language. They were reluctant to speak Japanese except with him — when a Japanese exchange student from another school was invited to come to talk to them, they felt uncomfortable and embarrassed. He thought, therefore, that the Year 12s were probably not really satisfied with their progress in that respect, but he said they could cope well with doing written exercises from the textbook.

The district relieving teacher said that most of her Year 8 students were not particularly worried about progressing or not, because the majority would not continue into Year 9 with any of the three languages. The subject mistress thought that in German some students were aware of some progression and did get a sense of satisfaction once something was mastered. However, this remark was made with reference to those of her students who had taken part in the German verse-speaking competition and were generally the best students anyway.

The views expressed by the Year 12 students tended to confirm the impressions of their teacher. They said they were not very fluent in Japanese and that holding a conversation with a native speaker would be difficult. They said the topics discussed would have to be simple, and added that they could not cope with Japanese spoken at a normal speed. Some of the tasks they felt capable of dealing with included understanding and giving instructions, handling prices and ordering food in restaurants. They were more confident in writing — they were used to writing essays of about 300—400 characters, on simple topics. One girl said she had a penfriend with whom she exchanged short letters. As far as reading was concerned, they stated that they could not read normal Japanese newspapers or magazines because they had not learnt a great number of kanji (characters).

The Year 9 group said they would probably not understand much spoken authentic Japanese and suspected native speech would be too fast for them. They felt confident, however, that they could convey their meaning, although imperfectly, and could cope with conversations concerning topics about the home. They felt less sure of their ability to cope in shops or restaurants. They said they had learnt some hiragana script but these were not useful for reading newspapers. They had acquired some knowledge of the culture through projects they had done.

No indication was explicitly given to the Japanese students at the beginning of a lesson or unit of work, what their teacher planned to cover or what was the purpose of the work to be done. Four of the Year 9s said it would help to be given an indication, while the remainder liked the teacher's approach because they said it 'keeps you on your guard'. The Year 12 group also said their teacher used the same approach with them, but they did not comment on what they thought of it.

Both groups said that the teacher's approach was not to begin a lesson from a certain topic or situation but from a particular grammatical structure or vocabulary item. Other activities done by the Year 12 and Year 9 groups usually involved translating (Japanese into English and vice versa), mostly in the written form. The Year 9s explained they sometimes made use of cards with hiragana or romaji script on them. Although they did not mind the teacher's usual approach (i.e. grammar and translation), they would have preferred the structural exercises to eventually lead to a conversation, perhaps acted out in front of the class. The Year 12 group simply said that learning the structures was a necessary evil, but they nonetheless wanted to do more oral work. They pointed out that they did have conversations, although these were usually with the teacher and specifically for assessment purposes.

The Year 9 class explained that the emphasis on writing rather than speaking was due to the fact that the lessons were geared to the assessment requirements of the (old) syllabus, which apparently only had 10 per cent allocated for oral work each semester. The Year 12 students felt that the lessons were too much centred around the prescribed textbook. This was the feeling of their teacher as well. The students added that the pace in class was slow and the repetition monotonous — this was also something of which their teacher was aware.

When asked about the textbook used in class, the Year 12 group pointed out that it contained some errors. Worksheets and simple readers were used, in addition to the textbook. Their teacher had shown some slides on Japanese culture and history but this was not a regular occurrence. The Year 9s mentioned they had seen one film twice, and had listened to tapes based on their textbook. The Year 12 students said that three out of the four weekly Japanese periods were taken as a composite class (with four Year 12s and 16 Year 10s) and that on such occasions, one class was set written work, while the teacher attended to the other class.

Although there were only 10 students in the Year 9 group, the class felt that they could do with more time in their lessons. They did point out, though, that their teacher moved about the class and tried to attend to every student in the group.

Both teachers and students were asked to describe any activities which occurred outside the classroom as an adjunct to normal Japanese lessons. The Japanese teacher said he had invited an exchange student from another school to spend a day in their school, on two occasions during the year. He had also taken some of the Year 9 and Year 12 students to a Japanese restaurant where the waitresses were Australian, but spoke a little Japanese. He said the excursion was organised principally for the Japanese food and surroundings. He indicated that a trip to Japan was not possible because of the prohibitive costs. He had casually approached several Japanese businessmen living in the neighbouring suburbs to come to speak to some of his classes, but nothing had yet eventuated in that respect.

Learning environment

The students' comments about their usual classroom for Japanese lessons were largely similar, since both groups regularly had their lessons in the same room. They thought the room was dark, and cold in the winter. There were some posters, maps and words indicating various objects in the room, but some of the Year 9s said that their teacher had taken some of the posters down. The room was sometimes noisy because the music room was situated directly above. Desks were placed in traditional rows and the Year 9 students said they preferred a circular or semi-circular arrangement, because it made the class more like a 'group'.

Timetable concerns

Because there was only one main teacher of Japanese in the school, he was automatically given the majority of classes, although four periods at the Year 8 level were taken by the district relieving teacher who had an honours degree in Japanese and had lived six months in Japan. The main Japanese teacher had done a major in Japanese and had previously regarded the subject as incidental because he was principally a history/maths/geography teacher who only took Year 8 Japanese. However, due to the departure of the former Japanese teacher, he was given total responsibility for the subject.

The allocation of teachers in the two other foreign languages was the result of teacher preferences, timetable constraints and the recommendations of both the principal and subject mistress. The subject mistress said that generally any new or inexperienced teachers were not given senior classes. Moreover, it was the school policy that if a teacher had taken a Year 9 class, he/she would be given the same cohort of students in Year 10 the following year, if possible. This also applied to the Years 11 and 12 classes. The Japanese teacher explained that an attempt was made not to give one teacher multiple classes at the same level.

Apart from the departure of the former Japanese teacher, the acting principal pointed out that the turnover in the foreign language staff had been extremely low for many years.

When asked to comment on other organisational aspects of their foreign language classes, the subject mistress referred to the unavoidable combining of French classes in Years 10 and 12 and Japanese classes in Years 10 and 12. She said that the administration had created a problem to overcome another problem, i.e. low numbers in foreign language classes in the upper school. However, she thought that the way in which the periods had been timetabled throughout the week was quite well done. For example, if a particular class for a certain subject was allocated the last period of the day, this would not occur again the following day, and usually an attempt was made to give that class an early morning period. Furthermore, the Japanese teacher said he had only one (Year 8) Japanese group which had a gap of four days maximum between one class and another (i.e. Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday). All his other language classes (four per week) were timetabled once a day on four days of the week. The district relieving teacher was also satisfied with her Year 8 periods in Japanese since she had no double periods at all.

Both the subject mistress and the Japanese teacher thought that the 45 to 50 minute periods (only the first two periods were 50 minutes) were a little too long to sustain the Year 8s' interest, but suggested that a variety of activities helped to overcome the problem of lack of interest or concentration on the part of the students. The length of periods was not a problem for the district relieving teacher. The subject mistress added that she would have preferred shorter lessons at all levels, with an extra lesson per day instead of the long periods.

Administrative support

The subject mistress suspected that the acting principal was not totally committed to maintaining the three foreign languages available in the school. She pointed out that he had referred to the possible dropping of one foreign language from the curriculum. However, discussions with the acting principal suggested that this was essentially a decision forced upon the administration by economic constraints, rather than any anti-foreign-language tendencies on the part of the acting principal. As far as the principal was concerned, the subject mistress thought he was not altogether against foreign languages but, at the same time, he did not seem to have a very positive attitude towards them either. She pointed out that foreign languages were not offered in as many streams as other subjects and that the timetabling of subjects was disadvantaging foreign languages. It was once possible to do two foreign languages to senior level at the school, but this was no longer the case.

The Japanese teacher had the impression that the foreign languages were an administrative nuisance in the school but he emphasised that in the particular year (1982), a class of four Year 12 students of Japanese was maintained by combining them with a Year 10 class — this indicated a tolerant, if not favourable, attitude towards foreign languages. On the other hand, the district relieving teacher thought the school was more interested in work experience subjects, i.e. providing practical subjects for students rather than purely academic ones.

With regard to the needs of the various languages for resources, the subject mistress said that the principal tried to have an even-handed approach in all subjects. A request had been made to him to approach the P & C Committee for a language room and his response had been positive. The Japanese teacher had stated that although he had not approached the administration for resources, he thought they would be willing to allocate money to Japanese if the request was considered reasonable. The district relieving teacher had not had any contact with the administration on this matter but remarked that each subject was allocated a grant and had access to student/subject levies collected each year.

When asked to comment on the administration's policies on time off for attendance of language teachers at seminars, foreign language workshops, etc. the subject mistress said that foreign languages were not discriminated against, but she said that the school policy was generally not very 'free' for releasing teachers. The Japanese teacher made the same comment and explained that the problem was a practical one of trying to find replacement teachers to take classes. The subject mistress said that if a seminar was regarded as worthwhile, then the head of the respective department would be allowed to attend.

None of the teachers could comment, from first hand knowledge, on the views of the present guidance officer towards foreign languages, but the subject mistress suspected that the less bright children were advised not to do a foreign language after Year 8.

In summing up, both the subject mistress and the district relieving teacher felt that the administration, generally, was more favourable towards English, mathematics and science subjects than towards foreign languages. The Japanese teacher disagreed, saying that foreign languages were treated equally with, and sometimes more favourably than, other subjects — he cited the case of classes with lower enrolments being tolerated in French, German and Japanese.

Teachers' general self-evaluation

Of the three teachers interviewed, only the subject mistress and the district relieving teacher had done a course in language method, as part of their Diploma in Education. The subject mistress had done French and German as part of her B.A., while the district relieving teacher had done a B.A. with honours in Japanese language. The main Japanese teacher at the school had done a major in both modern history and Japanese. He had a Certificate of Teaching but no language method. He admitted that although he was not secure about the future he was nonetheless happy to teach Japanese, but he was not satisfied with his own performance. Like his students, he was not confident when confronted with real Japanese. He was aware of the fact that his classes were getting second-hand Japanese with pronunciation and expressions which were not authentic. He felt that his spoken Japanese was not of a good enough standard for Year 12. He thought that his ability to read and write Japanese was adequate for that level however. It is worthwhile noting at this point that the Year 12 class believed they would perform better in Japanese if they had a native speaker as teacher. The Japanese teacher remarked that his knowledge of Japanese history and culture was adequate since he had done courses relating to those areas at university.

The district relieving teacher drew attention to the fact that she had last done Japanese five years ago at university and had lived in Japan for six months. This was the first time she had actually taught Japanese in Australia. Because of the lack of practice and use of Japanese, she had lost some confidence but she believed she would quickly regain her fluency with sufficient use of the language. Since she had lived in Japan, her knowledge of the culture was good.

Condition of foreign languages — present and future

The three teachers and the two classes were asked to give their views on why enrolments in foreign languages had been declining in Queensland.

The Year 12 girls suggested that competition from other subjects, the low priority given to foreign languages and lack of success in the subject all contributed to the decline. The Year 9s, too, suggested that foreign languages had a low priority compared to other subjects. In addition to this, they believed that students generally regarded foreign language learning as difficult and were not prepared to work hard. They said that many students were not even prepared to give the subject a fair chance.

All three teachers cited the dropping of the university language requirement as a major cause of the decline. Moreover, both the subject mistress and the Japanese teacher believed that other subjects were regarded as being more useful — the subject mistress suggested that students felt obliged to do mathematics and science. Both teachers also suggested that students were put off foreign languages because they suspected that the rating system was biased against them. For example, some good students who had ratings of 6 or 7 in Years 9/10, ended up with a 1 or 2 in Years 11/12. The subject mistress believed the moderation system had 'killed languages'. The district relieving teacher thought that foreign languages were stagnating and that other subjects offered students more varied and interesting activities.

The subject mistress said that foreign language enrolments could be bolstered if teachers were thoroughly qualified and were enthusiastic about the subject. She regretted the fact that many teachers, through no fault of their own, had been forced to teach a language without the necessary knowledge or training. The Japanese teacher added that enrolments could be helped by having more activities related to the cultural aspects of the language. He remarked that although such activities may lead to doing less language, that did not necessarily imply a decline in the quality of the lessons. At the same time, the subject would become more attractive. The district relieving teacher suggested that there should be more promotion of foreign languages as a relevant subject. However, she regretted the fact that they had to be 'sold' because of their second-rate standing among other subjects.

The subject mistress suggested that one way the school could help boost foreign language enrolments would be to offer a different range of subjects competing against languages on the timetable. But she admitted that this was only a piecemeal approach to the problem. She felt that, basically, students were forced too early to choose subjects in which they intended to specialise. The Japanese teacher thought there probably was more the school could do, but he personally had no suggestions to make on the matter. As far as he was concerned, he said he had been thinking of organising a sister-school in Japan, with which the students could exchange cassettes, letters and photographs, as well as arrange family visits in Japan.

When asked to comment on how the MLTAQ could aid enrolments in the State, the Japanese teacher proposed that the Association could arrange to have native Japanese liaison officers whose sole purpose would be to visit schools, provide realistic cultural input, and use of the language for students. The subject mistress said that one function the MLTAQ was attempting to fulfil was the pooling of ideas and the exchanging of teaching methods but she felt that they were not having a great effect because of the lack of support from teachers. She herself admitted to not being as involved with the Association as she had been in previous years. The district relieving teacher said that although she was not a member and had not had much contact with the MLTAQ, she saw the function as one of organising seminars on language method and resources.

The subject mistress suggested that the syllabus committes as well as the MLTAQ should be trying to keep more in touch with the average teacher in the classroom. However, no other comments were made by any of the teachers with regard to the syllabus committees or the possible future effect of ROSBA on foreign languages in the school, which was Phase II ROSBA.

The subject mistress further added that teacher training institutions were too far removed from a realistic classroom situation to provide foreign language teacher trainees with the appropriate skills for effective teaching. She believed that seeing and discussing demonstration lessons would be of greater use to future teachers than vague generalisations about educational method. The Japanese teacher remarked that undergraduate language courses still did not place sufficient emphasis on conversation, and spoken language generally, although he conceded that language courses had improved somewhat since he had done his tertiary studies at least 10 years ago.

The subject mistress was not very optimistic about the future of foreign language enrolments in the State, although she pointed out that in their school, the trends had been good with a 25 per cent increase in enrolments over the past two years. She thought that the key to success depended to a large extent on holding staff. Both the Japanese teacher and the district relieving teacher believed that teaching methods had to be geared to making foreign languages less academic, with the emphasis on the acquisition of practical skills, which would make foreign languages a valid career-oriented subject. This was more likely to happen with Japanese, rather than French or German, because of Australia's tourist and trade connections with Japan.

STUDY NO. 4 A large metropolitan State high school in south-east Queensland – ***Italian***

PROCEDURES USED

The first visit to the school occurred in the third week of August 1982, during which two members of the evaluation team spent about three and one-half days conducting interviews with the principal, the foreign language co-ordinator (mistress), other foreign language teachers and students of Italian. One class observation was also carried out during this initial visit. A second visit was required in order to gain a more detailed understanding of one of the foreign languages offered in the school, Italian. The second visit was arranged during the first week of November. One member of the evaluation team spent an additional day in the school. On this occasion, the principal was interviewed again and two further interviews were conducted with other foreign language teachers. These were the only Italian teacher and the acting foreign language co-ordinator whose major languages were French and German (the co-ordinator had left on study leave). Throughout the report, the views and comments of these latter teachers and the principal will be directly quoted. Another class interview and a further lesson observation were also carried out, as well as a brief survey of library and audio-visual resources for Italian. The information from the other interviews was used prior to the visit to focus on issues pertinent to the school.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE SCHOOL

School profile

The total enrolment for the school in the present study was about 1800 in 1982. The table below shows the enrolments in each year level. It should be noted that a high proportion of the students in this school are in Years 11 and 12. Traditionally, the school population in this school is not drawn entirely from the local community. In 1982, about one-third of the Year 8 students came from the local area.

	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	TOTAL
1982	370	365	360	340	345	1780

According to the principal, a 1981 survey of Year 8 and Year 10 students showed that 40 per cent of them had one or more parents born abroad. An estimated 20–25 per cent of the children did not always speak English at home. The largest non-Anglo-Saxon group in the school was Greek, followed by Italian, Vietnamese/South-East Asian, Russian and lastly Northern European. These students lived in the local area. Other ethnic groups represented in the school, but not drawn from the local community, were French, German and Danish.

Foreign language background and organisation

At the time of the visit, the school was implementing Phase I of the ROSBA foreign language syllabuses. Four foreign languages were available in Year 8. Students could choose to do only one of the following: French, German, Italian or Japanese. The study of a foreign language had been made compulsory to Year 10 by a previous principal. Italian was introduced in 1962. In Years 9 and 10, students had to study five core subjects.

These were: English
mathematics (advanced or ordinary)
science
history or geography or citizenship education
French or German or Italian or Japanese

Furthermore, students could select two or more subjects from the following: French, German, Italian, Japanese, history, geography, art, graphics, music, citizenship education, business principles, home economics, health and physical education, speech and drama.

In Years 11 and 12, students could select six subjects from the following: English, French, German, Italian, modern history, ancient history, geography, art, economics, biology, earth science, mathematics I, mathematics II, chemistry, physics, accountancy, logic, graphics, health and physical education, music and theatre. No Japanese was offered in Years 11 and 12 because the subject had only been introduced at the Year 8 level in 1981. A smorgasbord approach was adopted for the selection of Years 11 and 12 subjects. The principal indicated that in 1982, only 14 Year 11 students were not able to take their particular selection of subjects.

The principal explained that in Year 8, students of non-Anglo-Saxon background were usually advised to study a language which was different to the language used in the home. In Year 9, they were then encouraged to take up the mother tongue of their parents, if they wished to, in addition to the language begun in Year 8. It was pointed out later by the Italian teacher that the number of students in the school doing more than one language was extremely low. For example, there were only two such students in Year 9 in 1982. The Italian teacher also drew attention to the fact that she did not agree with the policy to encourage students to delay the learning of their parents' language until Year 9. She feared that they would be disadvantaged in the class since not many children spoke the standard language at home, but were more likely to speak or be acquainted with a dialect.

Although foreign languages were compulsory to Year 10, it was the school policy to exempt those students who were not native speakers of English and who were in need of tuition in ESL. The principal emphasised that those children were exempted from foreign language study, not because of poor performance in the subject, but rather because their poor knowledge of English was affecting their performance in other subjects. He continued by explaining that such students ideally should be receiving instruction in their mother tongue in the other school subjects while they were still learning English. Unfortunately, there was a lack of qualified bilingual teachers to cater for the needs of these students. Furthermore, he believed that if children were academically poor in all fields, it would benefit them to have some contact with a foreign language at some stage in their student career.

It was generally believed that allowing all students to study more than one foreign language would not have any positive effect on enrolment levels in the school. The Italian teacher said that there were not many students who wished to do one foreign language, let alone two. Moreover, both she and the acting foreign languages co-ordinator remarked that the compulsory status of foreign languages in Years 8 to 10 had not brought about the expected stable increase of enrolments into Year 11. An initial slight increase in enrolments occurred in 1981 from Year 10 to Year 11. The following year (1982) saw a doubling of the intake into Year 11, i.e. two classes of French and two of German compared to one class of each in the previous year. However, the expected enrolment for Year 11 in 1983 had been reduced to one class each of French and German. Total enrolments in Italian had dropped since the change to compulsory foreign language study, with 10 students choosing Italian for Year 11 in 1981 and only four in 1982. Since Japanese was only introduced in 1981, there were no Year 11 students at the time of the visit.

The principal expressed the view that the introduction of compulsory foreign language study in the junior school had been a disastrous decision and from 1983 onwards the school was reverting to two-year compulsory foreign language study in Year 8 and Year 9 only.

Language choice

The principal commented that at least one Asian language should remain in the school's curriculum. As far as the European languages were concerned, the principal said that if a choice had to be made between French and German, he personally would opt to retain French. He added that he was considering the introduction of Greek as a subject after school hours. Once a pool of teachers of Greek had been established in the area, and continuity was guaranteed for the language, he would then consider offering Greek as a normal school subject. No specific mention was made by the principal of his views towards Italian. It is worth noting that the Italian teacher suspected that Greek would eventually replace Italian in the school.

The acting foreign language co-ordinator said that she supported the choice of foreign languages offered by the school and given the ideal situation, she would introduce any additional foreign language, provided the staff and resources were available. She was of the opinion that the choice of a particular foreign language was not important. She believed that the study of any foreign language was a valid exercise in itself, with the aim of broadening a student's outlook and contributing to his/her personal and academic development. The Italian teacher, on the other hand, considered that Italian and/or Greek were more appropriate languages to teach, given Australia's migrant population, although personally she felt more strongly in favour of Italian. She also believed that Japanese or any Asian language should be taught in the school.

The number of students choosing to study a foreign language greatly influenced the continued availability of that language in the school. Because of dwindling enrolments in Russian, that language was being phased out of the curriculum. Only three to four students were choosing to continue Russian in the upper school. This was also happening in Italian, but such small classes were still being tolerated by the administration.

Library and audio-visual resources

The language section on Italian contained copies of an audio-visual course and an Italian-English conversation text. The remainder of the section held a variety of grammar/translation-style textbooks. The Italian teacher pointed out that she had borrowed most of the other materials in that section for her own use. These were largely grammar books.

The section on Italian literature was well-stocked with a series of children's stories (traditional fairy tales, fables and more modern literature), some readers for Italian primary school children, three volumes of Asterix cartoons and one Charlie Brown cartoon book. There were also a few novels, as well as Italian translations of English novels. Other books were devoted to a variety of topics, including trains, ships, inventions, geography and regions of Italy.

Other areas of the library did not appear to contain any major subsections of Italian. The section on European countries contained only two books – one on Italy (its people and geography) and another on Italian government. The art section held two volumes entitled *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* and a book on the art treasures of Italy.

The audio-visual section contained recordings of the television broadcast *Avventura*. However, the new series screened in 1982 could not be recorded because of the unavailability of the video recording equipment. Only two film items were held — an Italian movie and a short clip of Gina Lollobrigida.

Recordings were held, on sound cassette, of an ABC program about the regions, social life and customs of Italy. Topics covered included songs, folk tales, popular heroes, monuments and Italian songs. Sound cassettes on the Italian language, to accompany the course 'Basic Conversational Italian' were available, as well as two other similar taped courses.

There appeared to be only two sets of slides (on farming/irrigation and the Mediterranean) and three games (bingo, monopoly, scrabble).

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

For the purposes of the study, only the comments and views of the two teachers interviewed during the second visit and the principal were included below. The responses of two classes (four Year 11 girls) and a group of 20 Year 9 Italian students (14 female) were incorporated in the study.

Reasons for studying foreign languages and general views about foreign language learning

When asked to cite any benefits to be derived from the study of a foreign language, the Italian teacher said that she believed the joy of being able to communicate in another language and the sense of achievement derived from that, was benefit enough in itself. She added that one's awareness of English would be heightened through the study of a foreign language. The acting subject co-ordinator thought that the benefits were long-term and regarded this factor as one of the difficulties in justifying the study of a language to students who, on the whole, were more concerned with the short-term returns of their subjects. She believed that students would eventually benefit from foreign language study once they had the opportunity to travel or become involved in community work, perhaps with people whose mother tongue was not English. She further maintained that foreign language study contributed to a broadening of the mind. She said it was particularly important for students to realise that the manner in which Australians lived was not the only possible lifestyle. In contrast to this, the principal thought that the main aim of foreign language study should not be to learn to speak a language fluently, but rather to try to understand the people and their culture.

For the Year 11 and Year 12 students, the advantages of foreign language study were related to future travel abroad, employment opportunities and simply being able to communicate with others who did not speak English. The Year 11 girls mentioned that learning about a different culture was an advantage. One pointed out that in Australia, one came into contact with many people from different language backgrounds. One advantage posited by the Year 9 group was related to future study prospects overseas. A second student suggested that learning a foreign language aided one's understanding of English. Only one boy in Year 9 believed that it should be the responsibility of others to learn English.

Both the Italian teacher and the acting subject co-ordinator upheld the present principal's decision to make foreign languages compulsory only to the end of Year 9. The maintaining of compulsory foreign language study in Years 8 and 9 was partly to safeguard against students developing a monolingual/monocultural attitude. Students also had to overcome negative parental influences regarding foreign languages. Once students had gained some knowledge of a foreign language, they were in a better position at the end of Year 9, to make final subject choices. The acting subject co-ordinator believed that many students chose subjects simply because of their like or dislike of a teacher. The Italian teacher maintained that making any subject compulsory had a negative effect on students. For example, if students were not motivated to do a foreign language, no teaching approach would succeed.

The two student groups were asked why they had chosen to study a foreign language. One of the major reasons given by the Year 9 group was the compulsory status of the subject in the junior school. However, two students also said they had done a foreign language in primary school. Another thought foreign language study was a 'bludge'. One Year 11 girl said she had decided to continue with Italian because it was a useful subject for teaching. Another girl in Year 11 suggested it was a good idea to have a foreign language in case of future travel overseas. A third Year 11 girl indicated that the guidance officer had advised students to continue with a foreign language if they had been doing well in the subject — they were told it would contribute to obtaining a good TE score.

The choice of Italian, rather than French or German, was influenced by a number of factors. One Year 9 girl said she needed Italian for music. Another, a Greek girl, said she thought Italian would be an easy subject because she claimed that it was similar to Greek in some respects. Other reasons suggested by the Year 9 group for choosing Italian included future employment prospects (e.g. becoming an air hostess), peer pressure and having a sister who studied the same foreign language. This last reason was also given by one of the Year 11 girls. Two other Year 11 students said they had chosen Italian because they had an Italian home background. One girl said she simply carried on because she had done it to Year 10 when foreign languages were made compulsory.

While both student groups believed that both males and females should study foreign languages, the Year 11 group specified that the ideal foreign language student was a broadminded, outgoing, gregarious and creative person. On the other hand, the Year 9 group suggested that the ideal foreign language student had to be intelligent and interested in not only the language but in its people, culture and world events as well. Such a student would, ideally, have parents who were native speakers of the foreign language he/she was learning. However, having a 'decent teacher' was also very important.

The Year 11 students suggested that one factor which made foreign language learning more difficult than other subjects was that foreign languages required cumulative learning, i.e. one had to know and constantly rely on the language consolidated over previous years. In addition to this, conceptual thinking in other subjects was done in English, whereas foreign language subjects required the student to think in the foreign language. Reactions in the Year 9 group were mixed. About half the group thought foreign language learning was easier than the learning involved in other subjects, while the other half thought the opposite. Reasons given by the latter group included the complex grammar and pronunciation. Another difficulty was that a foreign language was a new subject, previously not encountered in primary school by the majority of students. One student drew attention to the fact that 'some of us can't even speak English properly'.

Teachers' perceptions of the attitudes of others towards foreign language study

The Italian teacher and the acting subject co-ordinator agreed that student attitudes towards foreign language study depended a great deal on the year level of the students. In Years 8 to 10, the acting subject co-ordinator believed that the majority were lukewarm. She later qualified this by suggesting that they were either noncommittal or negative.

The Italian teacher was convinced that about half the students in the junior school hated foreign language study. She felt that this negative attitude was created by the compulsory status of foreign languages to Year 10. She thought the other 50 per cent would have chosen to do a foreign language of their own volition. She further added that those who continued foreign language study in Year 11 and Year 12 liked the subject and usually obtained good results. There was also a group of students who dropped the foreign language, although they were doing well, because they felt constrained to do science and mathematics. They considered these subjects more useful for their prospective tertiary courses.

The acting subject co-ordinator believed that students who chose to continue with their foreign language study fell into three broad categories: (i) those who liked foreign languages and obtained good results; (ii) those who had no strong feelings about the subject, obtained good results and were motivated to continue because of this; and (iii) those for whom the subject was regarded as 'the sixth subject' but who also had obtained good results in the junior school.

With regard to students' attitudes towards their lessons, the teachers generally agreed these also varied according to the year level. The acting subject co-ordinator believed that students in Year 8 undertook their compulsory foreign language study eagerly at first, only to be disappointed in Years 9 and 10, because of the negative effects of the large classes and the short time available for the subject (only three periods per week in the junior school). Under such circumstances, she said that even a good teacher would not be able to give each student the required attention and assistance. She believed this was especially necessary in a foreign language class where the teacher's monitoring of students' language use was of extreme importance as a safeguard against the acquisition of bad language habits. The Italian teacher referred to the interference of those students in Years 9 and 10 who would not have chosen to do foreign languages, had they not been compulsory. The disruptions caused by their misbehaviour resulted in there being less time to cover the prescribed work. This, in turn, left no time for the more informal language learning activities, such as games. By Year 11 and Year 12, both teachers agreed that the atmosphere was more positive and students enjoyed their lessons more, tending to regard them as a break or diversion from their other lessons.

It is worth noting the students' responses to this question. When asked whether they enjoyed their Italian lessons more than other subjects, the Year 9 students' response was largely a positive one, with about half the class indicating they enjoyed their foreign language lessons more. The Year 11 students overwhelmingly agreed that they enjoyed their Italian lessons more than other subjects because of the friendlier atmosphere and the variety in the lessons.

No major complaints were made by the Italian students regarding homework. The acting subject co-ordinator believed her German students actually preferred to do their German homework rather than homework in other subjects.

As far as the students' awareness of their progress in the foreign language subjects was concerned, the acting subject co-ordinator suspected that for the majority of students in the lower levels, this did not go beyond an awareness of the number of chapters covered. The Italian teacher said that in the junior school not a great deal of Italian work was done anyway and she had the impression that her Italian students were not really learning much. By Year 11 and Year 12, students had more time to do more language work and to notice that they were getting somewhere. The acting subject co-ordinator believed that by that stage, students were more genuinely concerned about their own personal progress.

The acting subject co-ordinator was inclined to think that the guidance officer's attitude towards foreign languages was a negative one. The Year 11 students had told her that he had advised them to give up the subject if they didn't like it and especially if they were not obtaining good results, since this would adversely affect their TE score. The Italian teacher did not think the guidance officer was against foreign languages and although she knew that any students attempting to get out of doing foreign languages in the junior school would go to him, he alone was in no position to exempt them.

The acting subject co-ordinator was of the opinion that parents were 'drastically divided' in their opinions on foreign language study. Those who were pro-foreign-languages were so because, since leaving school, they had realised the value of the subject. She believed that those parents who were against foreign languages had that attitude because they had studied a foreign language themselves, hated it and thought it had been a waste of time. Another reason was that they expected their children to pursue an occupation which had no specific foreign language requirement. Although the Italian teacher had not spoken to parents, she believed that the children's attitudes were a valid indication of their parents' attitudes. Basing her judgment on the students' views, therefore, she believed that about 50 per cent of parents were basically against foreign languages, while the other half held the opposite view.

Students' perceptions of the attitudes of others towards foreign language study

When the students were asked what they considered to be the guidance officer's views on foreign language study, the Year 11 students backed up the comments of the acting subject co-ordinator who believed that his advice essentially depended on a student's success or otherwise in the subject in Years 8 to 10. The Year 9 class did not appear to know whether his attitude was a positive or a negative one. As for the form teachers, three of the Year 11 girls said their form teacher taught French and some of the Year 9 group had a teacher of history as their form teacher who had expressed an interest in foreign languages.

The Year 11 group said their parents were supportive of their choice to continue with Italian. The majority of the Year 9 students also said their parents considered foreign language study a valid pursuit. However, when asked what their parents thought of their having chosen Italian, 12 said they thought it was a good idea, three said they considered it a waste of time, while the other five students could not comment on their parents' views. The Year 11 girls believed their peers doing science and mathematics regarded foreign language study 'a bludge'.

Students' comments about foreign language teachers

The two classes were asked to describe what they considered as a good or competent teacher of foreign languages. Both groups suggested that such a teacher would ideally be a native speaker of the language he/she taught or at least have a sound knowledge of the language. The Year 11 group also maintained that a good teacher would be acquainted with the culture of the language. In addition to this, a good foreign language teacher would be a happy person who encouraged students in their learning. Both the Year 11 and Year 9 classes believed such a teacher would be interested in and would have a very positive attitude towards the particular language he/she taught. Patience, flexibility and a sense of humour were also mentioned. The Year 9s also added that a good teacher was one who could relate to students, was not too strict and was not a snob.

Some negative teacher characteristics were also suggested. For the Year 11 group, these included a teacher who concentrated too much on grammar or who was a perfectionist. For the Year 9s, these included a teacher who was too strict and impatient, made the class work without a break and who did not know the foreign language.

Lessons and related activities

When asked to give an indication of the tasks they could handle using Italian, the Year 9 class said they would find it difficult to understand a native speaker unless the language used was simple. They believed they could read and understand signs and were capable of writing 80-word essays. The Year 11 students thought they had acquired enough Italian to survive in Italy. For example, they would be able to give and follow directions, order food in a restaurant and read street signs. As far as their writing skills were concerned, they felt they were capable of writing invitations and making up dialogues and stories.

The Year 9 group were asked to describe what else had been done in class. It appeared that their teacher had mostly been through various topics, e.g. sport, housing, suburbs, family, place names, buildings, furniture and transport. The Year 11 class, on the other hand, had been taught how to cope with getting a bus ticket, depositing cheques, posting letters, getting information about trains, buying things in a shop, requesting assistance and using Italian telephones.

The Year 9 class said that the topics they had covered were generally good and some of them would be useful if they were to travel to Italy. The Year 11 girls also said that what they had done in their lessons would be useful to them.

Each class was asked to explain what kinds of activities were done in class. The Year 9 students said that their teacher would usually begin the lesson from a grammatical point of view. The class was particularly eager to suggest changes to their lessons. For instance, they wanted to have more role-play and videos, and preferred to have some lessons outside the classroom. The Year 11 girls said that classroom activities included doing conversations in pairs, play-acting and viewing slides. One girl said she would have preferred to have done more literature and at the same time the whole group also suggested that more speaking should be done in class. Another suggestion was to cook Italian food and visit an Italian restaurant.

Both groups said that their teacher gave the class an indication of the work to be covered for a particular period and why. However, while the Year 9 students were given a fairly detailed account of the work to be done in a 'semester format', the information given to the Year 11 students appeared to be less detailed and more irregular.

With regard to inviting members of the local Italian community into the classroom, the Italian teacher said she doubted that such people would be good models for her students, since many would have strong dialectal influences in their speech. Furthermore, she believed that a certain talent was needed to handle a classroom situation. She said, however, that she was planning a class visit to the ethnic radio studios during one of their regular Italian broadcasts.

Activities which occurred outside the classroom included, for both groups, participation in a 'language day' held on a Saturday with other schools. A dance or 'carnevale' was successfully organised as well. The Italian teacher had tried to organise an Italian camp which eventually did not take place because of insufficient response from students. Similarly, student response was not good to the annual Dante Society verse-speaking competition. The Italian teacher admitted to not pushing students into participating unless they were particularly motivated. She saw little value in making them memorise and recite poetry which was often not properly understood by them. She pointed out that response to such activities was usually poor because they often occurred outside school time on Saturdays during which many Year 11 and Year 12 students had part-time work. She also referred to an MLTAQ-organised trip to Italy which was cancelled due to insufficient student numbers.

Learning environment

Both student groups interviewed had their Italian lessons in the same classroom. Their views about the classroom contrasted sharply. The 20 Year 9 students found the room uncomfortable, boring, dirty, hot in summer and lacking in any 'Italian feeling'. The four Year 11 girls described the room as cosy, and their lessons were 'like sitting down with friends'. The Year 9 class thought the desks were constricting and tightly packed into the room. For this reason, they preferred to go outside. The Year 11 group, on the other hand, could sit in a circle in the room.

Timetable concerns

The Year 9 group thought their three weekly lessons were sometimes not sufficient because of the size of the class, although they said theirs was a relatively small class compared to classes in other subjects. The Year 11 class had five lessons each week (one per day) and were happy with the time devoted to them and the manner in which the classes were timetabled.

As pointed out above, only three periods per week were allotted to foreign languages in the lower school. The acting subject co-ordinator said that foreign languages in the lower school had always had only three periods per week and there was no question of this being a compromise resulting from the decision to make foreign language study compulsory to Year 10. However, both she and the Italian teacher said that such an arrangement resulted in some classes having a maximum of four days break between lessons. The minimum length of periods was 35 minutes and the maximum was 50 minutes. There was also a 40 and a 45 minute period. The acting subject co-ordinator considered 45 minutes to be a good length for both the younger and the older students. The Italian teacher drew attention to the fact that the variation in the duration of periods resulted in her two Year 9 Italian classes not getting the same number of minutes each week. For example, the 20-student group had 20 minutes more each week than the other 10-student Year 9 class. This had not been planned, but had occurred by chance. While she was fortunate that the larger group had the extra time, she explained that the smaller group was made up of less able students who would also have benefited from having more lesson time.

Both teachers complained of interruptions to foreign language lessons. The acting subject co-ordinator said this was due to the reading out of daily notices brought to each class by 'runners'. This was an improvement on the previous system whereby all classes were interrupted via the intercom. The Italian teacher maintained that the many extra-curricular activities in which the students were engaged often caused them to arrive late to classes.

The principal explained that the main factor taken into account when allocating foreign language teachers to year levels was their language competence. He regarded a competent teacher as one who was either a native speaker of the language or someone who had done at least two years of post-secondary study in the language. He indicated that at some stage, all such teachers would have taught the whole range of year levels, i.e. Years 8 to 12. According to the teachers interviewed, it was usually the case that the least experienced teachers (i.e. those for whom the foreign language was a minor subject) were given the lower levels to teach. For this reason partly, the acting subject co-ordinator suspected that languages were getting 'killed off so early'. Ideally, she believed that the best teachers should teach Years 8 and 9. At the same time, there was a conflicting need for competent teachers, in particular those with very good oral skills, at the Years 11 and 12 levels. She explained that, personally, one should 'teach what you feel confident to teach'. The Italian teacher recounted how she came to replace the previous Italian teacher. The former teacher had been asked to teach Years 8 to 12, although she herself had only studied Italian to Year 12 level. She admitted to the administration that she lacked the confidence to teach the subject and was, as a result, replaced by the present Italian teacher.

Administrative support

When asked how she thought the principal felt about foreign languages, the Italian teacher said she did not know, since she had never discussed the matter with him. The acting subject co-ordinator believed he was favourable towards foreign languages and felt they should be compulsory for at least two years in the junior school. She further remarked that when the need for resources arose, the decision was usually at the discretion of the subject co-ordinator rather than the principal, whose signature was merely an administrative requirement. Provided the funds were available, the subject co-ordinator had the right to spend the money as he/she saw fit. The Italian teacher said she had ordered some material for the lower school. She admitted to being reluctant to buy resources (the majority of which could not be obtained in Brisbane) because it was often impossible to know whether the materials ordered would be appropriate for the desired levels.

She went on to say that she had not been to any of the ROSBA seminars because the school was permitted to send only two representatives. French and German were selected. However, she said she had attended two seminars for the review panels, since she herself was a member of the Italian review panel. In 1981, she had also attended a one-day seminar on the functional/notional approach to language teaching, upon which the new ROSBA language syllabuses were based. She had not asked to attend any other activities for foreign languages and said she would only request to go to activities which she considered absolutely worthwhile. She commented that since there were so few teachers of Italian, very little was organised for them in any case. The acting subject co-ordinator objected to the holding of seminars, etc. on weekends or after school. For this reason, she had stopped attending many of them. She believed she would be allowed to attend any activities organised in school time, provided there was someone available to take her classes.

Although both teachers believed that the principal was essentially a supporter of foreign languages, the Italian teacher claimed that the school as a whole was science-oriented and she suspected that students felt they had to do science in the senior school. The acting subject co-ordinator believed that the school was gearing subjects to those students who would continue on to tertiary study.

Teachers' general self-evaluation

The Italian teacher had originally trained to be a primary teacher (Mount Gravatt) then completed a B.A. at Griffith University. She had a Sicilian home background but subsequently learnt Italian at university. She had not done any language method subjects. She was confident of her knowledge of the language and culture, having spent nine months in Italy. However, she said she was becoming bored because of the low level language she was constrained to use in the junior school. This was not such a problem in the senior school. She had been at the school for two years.

The acting subject co-ordinator had a B.A. majoring in French and German, with honours in French. She had completed a Diploma in Education with two language method subjects. After her university studies, she spent two years in Europe, teaching in France and studying in Germany. In 1980, she spent four months in Europe, at her own expense, in order to brush up on her French and German language skills. However, because she was unable to obtain any tax concessions for the trip, she said she would not undertake a similar trip again. When asked how she felt as a language teacher, she retorted that she felt 'in danger of becoming an endangered species'.

Condition of foreign languages — present and future

The students and teachers were asked to give what they saw as the reasons behind the declining enrolments in foreign languages in the State. The two classes interviewed thought that fewer students were opting to do foreign languages because they were regarded as difficult. For example, the Year 9 group said that the pace was often too fast, which resulted in the slower students being left behind. The Year 11 girls explained that foreign languages became harder to cope with as students progressed from Year 8 to Year 9, i.e. more serious work had to be done in Year 9, in contrast to the less serious approach in Year 8. They also suspected the decline in enrolments was partly due to the traditional emphasis given to European languages such as French and German, rather than Asian languages. The latter, they believed, were seen by students as being more relevant, given Australia's proximity to Asia. One Year 9 boy suggested that the dropping of the foreign language requirement for arts was a major factor in the decline. Another reason posited by the Year 9s was the boring teaching methods employed in foreign languages. Other reasons given included the perceived low priority of foreign languages compared to other subjects, which 'get you a job'. Competition from a wide variety of subjects now offered in schools was also regarded as having a negative effect on enrolments. One Year 9 student said that many students found English difficult and therefore suspected that foreign languages would also be difficult subjects. Another Year 9 student said that there was no reason to learn a foreign language because 'others speak English'.

The teachers reiterated some of the reasons posited by the two student groups. They too believed that the abolition of the foreign language requirement for arts was partly responsible for the decline in enrolments. The acting subject co-ordinator suspected that bad teaching was also a significant factor. Furthermore, she believed that students were under pressure to do subjects 'that count', i.e. mathematics and science. The Italian teacher thought that many students who would have liked to continue with foreign language study in the upper school, were deciding against continuing because of their belief that such a subject would have a negative effect on their TE score. She believed this to be a myth.

When asked to give suggestions as to how foreign language enrolments could be improved, the Italian teacher said the most she herself could do, was to encourage Year 10 students to continue to study. She had asked the present Year 11s to point out to the Year 10s the advantages of doing a subject with such small numbers. The acting subject co-ordinator's suggestion was to remove the school's policy of compulsory foreign language study to Year 10. This, she said, would improve the quality of enrolments and would remove the negative influence of those students who would not have voluntarily chosen to do the subject.

The two teachers were asked to comment on the possible role of the MLTAQ in boosting enrolments. The acting subject co-ordinator believed that the Association was already doing the best it could by organising activities such as the Oktoberfest. The Italian teacher did not think the Association was really in a position to effect any major changes and she felt that it was the reponsibility of the Department of Education to change its policies in such a way as to bring about a revival of foreign languages.

With regard to the effects of ROSBA on enrolments, both teachers agreed that it was too early to make any predictions. The Italian teacher felt, however, that the new syllabuses would make foreign language learning more practical and would make students realise that foreign languages could be a real means of communication. The acting subject co-ordinator's views contrasted with the Italian teacher's largely positive outlook. She claimed that the overall effect of ROSBA had been a negative one, on teachers at least. She said that foreign language teachers had been asked to do too much extra work without any financial or other compensations such as adequate time off for the writing of work programs. She maintained that the foreign language teaching workforce had been grossly abused.

The acting subject co-ordinator was not happy with the quality of training in the various teacher training institutions. She based her remark on the teacher trainees she had supervised over the years. She believed that experience in the classroom was more useful than the courses available. While trainees had the need to get more first-hand experience in the classroom, there was, nonetheless, a limit to the amount of class time and attention which teachers in schools could afford to give up in order to provide prac-teaching opportunities for teacher trainees. The Italian teacher, on the other hand, drew attention to the fact that the student teachers she had had in Italian had been good. She admitted that Italian was proabably an exceptional area since many of the trainees had Italian home backgrounds and their language skills were of a higher standard than those of the average foreign language teacher trainee.

Neither the acting subject co-ordinator nor the Italian teacher was able to comment on the future of foreign language enrolments in the State, but both believed that the future of French, German, Italian and Japanese in their particular school depended to a large extent on the dropping of the compulsory status of foreign language study to Year 10. They agreed with the principal's proposal to reduce the foreign language requirement to Years 8 and 9 and were confident that this would help eliminate the detrimental influence in the classroom of those students who would not have chosen to continue to Year 10. In this way, foreign language learning for those truly interested would become a more pleasant and successful experience, the effects of which would hopefully carry over from the lower school into the upper school.

STUDY NO. 5 A small independent all girls secondary school in a provincial city in the central Queensland coastal area – *Japanese*

PROCEDURES USED

A total of two and one-half days were spent consecutively in the school by one researcher during the second week of November 1982. The only language teacher in the school was interviewed on the first day of the visit and the principal's interview was conducted on the final day. In addition, three classes of Japanese students were interviewed. Two lesson observations were arranged in the lower school because it was not possible to find a suitable time to observe a Year 11 or Year 12 class. A survey of library and audio-visual resources was carried out.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE SCHOOL

School profile

The total enrolment as at November 1982 stood at 290 as shown in the table below. (The school also offered Years 4–7 in the primary level which represented 38 additional pupils.) Of the 290 secondary students, 171 were boarders. A high proportion of students were in Years 11 and 12. The principal indicated that it was the school's policy to remain a relatively small school. The school population was largely Anglo-Saxon, with only about eight Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and two Indian girls.

	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	TOTAL
1982	59	54	61	56	60	290

Foreign language background and organisation

In 1982, Japanese was compulsory in Year 8 only. In Years 9 and 10, it was timetabled against business principles and typewriting. From 1983, a common general course would be offered in Years 8 and 9. According to the handbook, this was intended to provide a balanced broad-based education, and to delay choices until Year 10. Japanese was to become compulsory in both Year 8 and Year 9, and optional thereafter. In Year 9, however, English expression would be offered as an alternative to Japanese for those students who were considered to be in need of additional tuition in English.

In Year 10, the following subjects would constitute the compulsory core in 1983:

English
mathematics
science
physical education
general studies

Japanese would be timetabled among the optional subjects. Students would choose between the foreign language and two other subjects, business principles and typewriting.

In Year 11 and Year 12, subject choice was based on a smorgasbord approach, i.e. at the end of Year 10, all students were able to choose any of the following subjects offered in the upper school: English; Japanese; modern history; ancient history; geography; film and television; economics; mathematics I; mathematics II, social mathematics; chemistry; biological science; physics; secretarial studies; secretarial I*; accounting; home economics; home arts*; arts and crafts*; and human movement and health*. Each year, therefore, the manner in which subjects would be timetabled depended on the preferences of the Year 10s and the extent to which their choices could be accommodated administratively in any particular year. In 1982, Japanese was timetabled against modern history in Year 11 and against maths II in Year 12.

The principal explained that every attempt was made to accommodate the subject preferences of the students in Year 11 and said that usually 85–90 per cent of the students were given their choice. In 1982, only one of the Year 11 girls who would have chosen to do Japanese, could not do so because the subject had to be timetabled against modern history, which she also wished to study. The principal added that the Japanese teacher ideally wanted Japanese students to combine their foreign language with business studies. However, this was not possible due to the insufficient demand for the combination. It is worth noting that the Japanese teacher protested that Japanese and shorthand were always the last subjects to be accommodated in the timetable. The principal pointed out that this was not the case. Year 11 and Year 12 subjects were accommodated first. Once subjects requiring blocks of time (e.g. art and home arts) were timetabled, other subjects were then programmed, not necessarily in any particular order. In the lower school, subjects were timetabled very much according to the availability of teachers, many of whom taught from Year 8 to Year 12.

The present school was also considering an arrangement to combine the senior school Japanese classes with a neighbouring school. Much discussion was still required before a decision could be made on the matter.

Language choice

The Japanese teacher drew attention to the fact that their school was the first to introduce Japanese in the region. It was first introduced in 1972 at Year 9 level. This was partly the result of a campaign to promote the language by the Japanese Department of the University of Queensland. Previously, French was the major language offered in the school but Japanese eventually came to be regarded as a more relevant foreign language, given Australia's proximity to Japan. The decision to drop French was largely due to two factors — the declining enrolments in the subject and the inability of the school to support two foreign languages. This, the Japanese teacher said, became a problem in 1980, when the total school enrolment had reached a low level. A survey of Year 8 preferences in 1980 showed that only two students wished to study French. The principal believed that there was more parental support for Japanese rather than French because of the employment opportunities (requiring Japanese) that were expected to increase in the region. The principal was confident that Japanese was still fulfilling the demand for foreign languages, although some inquiries had been made by parents regarding the possibility of their daughters doing French or German.

* school subjects

Although the Japanese teacher was of the opinion that Japanese was an appropriate language to teach in the school, she said she would be in favour of any other Asian language, for example, Indonesian or Chinese. In addition to an Asian language, she would also favour the introduction of Spanish. She pointed out that many South American concerns were buying cattle stations in Queensland.

Library and audio-visual resources

The language section of the library was mainly stocked with a variety of texts on Japanese script, grammar, vocabulary and phonetics. These textbooks appeared to be geared to adults and secondary students learning Japanese as a foreign language, as well as to children learning Japanese as their mother tongue. There was also a book of the most frequently used vocabulary items in Japanese.

The literature section of the library contained about 20 texts related to Japanese, the majority of which were Japanese novels translated into English.

The geography section had an extensive range of books on Japanese culture, its people and geography. Also in this section were kits of slides, cassettes and notes on various topics, e.g. Japanese rural life, home life, the theatre, festivals, the tea ceremony, a wedding, the kimono and major cities.

A small selection of economic and political accounts were housed in the history section. In addition to this, a variety of books were scattered about in various other sections of the library – these included a volume on Japanese monuments, another on samurai, one on Japan, its art, nature and people, one on Tokyo and a volume about Japanese cooking.

The materials on audio-cassettes held in the audio-visual section of the library were also extensive. There was a large number of recordings of broadcasts on Japanese social life and customs. Other cassettes covered topics such as history, places of interest, restaurants, festivals, customs, schools, social life, theatre, seasons, train journeys, fishing, shopping, telephones, sports, music, bird life, food and many other topics. There were also slides available to accompany many of the topics on cassette.

Cassettes relating to the Japanese language were also extensive, with at least five different sets of cassettes to accompany textbooks. There were also about 16 films and videos on various aspects of Japanese society, economics and history. Equipment housed in the audio-visual room included cassette recorders for student and classroom use; headsets; slide projectors for individual and classroom use; a record player; an overhead projector; a movie projector; and a video recorder.

In addition to the book and audio-visual materials in the library, further material was housed in the Japanese resources room which was also used for the small Years 11 and 12 classes. In the middle of the room were tables arranged in a circle. There were shelves with sets of books for class use, including a dictionary. Cupboards contained culture notes, song sheets, worksheets, xylophones and boxes of kanji for various year levels. There were also extra headphones.

There was a display cabinet of Japanese artefacts: pottery, fans, items of cloth and bamboo. Japanese magazines and square paper for brush and paint work were also available. On a notice board were displayed newspaper clippings about Japan, advertisements for jobs requiring foreign language skills, literature on Japanese language institutes and information about scholarships. Around the room there were posters, maps, charts of Japanese characters, hangings of Japanese script and pictures of Japan.

In the school's regular Japanese classroom (for Years 8 to 10), there was also a display cabinet of Japanese artefacts, shelves of textbooks and four sets of a game aimed at facilitating the learning of Japanese characters. A slide projector, a screen attached to the wall, more headsets, an overhead projector, a cassette recorder and sets of tapes for homework were also available.

Around the classroom there were various maps (printed in Japanese), charts of vocabulary items and pictures, a Japanese calendar, transparencies of Japanese characters and a notice board with items of interest to Japanese students.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

The comments and views of the Japanese teacher and the principal are reported in the section that follows. Also included are the responses of the three Japanese classes interviewed. These were 31 students in Year 8, 14 students in Year 10 and three in Year 11.

Reasons for studying foreign languages and general views about foreign language learning

Both students and staff were asked if they believed foreign language study would bring any benefits or advantages to learners. The Japanese teacher thought foreign language learning gave students the opportunity to find out more about, and to question, their own language and culture. It also contributed to making students appreciate and love their own language, as well as aiding their understanding of it. The principal's views were similar and she added that foreign languages helped to overcome prejudices which may exist in students.

The Year 8 class saw the advantages of learning Japanese as being associated with teaching, interpreting or embassy work. Travel abroad and being able to communicate with foreigners were other advantages to be gained from the study of any foreign language. The Year 10 and Year 11 groups also mentioned future job and study prospects involving Japanese. Another benefit for these two groups was the awareness and better understanding they had acquired of their own language, English. One Year 10 girl said that the study of a foreign language had made her more careful with English, especially when reading instructions in test papers. Others in the class agreed with her on this point. The Year 11 girls said that one advantage for them was the better understanding they gained of other people, as well as the opportunity to associate with them. All three Year 11 students had Japanese penpals and enjoyed writing to them.

The Japanese teacher was supportive of the school's move towards delayed specialisation and was interested in seeing the results of making foreign languages compulsory in Years 8 and 9 from 1983 onwards. The principal believed that even Year 10 was too early for students to make decisions, yet because of time constraints, it was necessary to reduce the core of compulsory subjects. It was, therefore, not possible to include foreign languages, for example, in the compulsory Year 10 curriculum. The Japanese teacher also realised that, at some stage, choices had to be made. She believed that foreign language study should be compulsory for part of a student's school career because she thought it was important for Australians 'to open their eyes' to a different culture. She also maintained that Australia needed more bilingual speakers.

However, she said she had noticed that, often, those students with learning problems in Japanese were also having difficulties in English. She also felt that nothing was achieved by forcing students to take a subject they did not like or for which they were not prepared to work hard. She claimed that foreign language study required a good memory, a reasonable intelligence, as well as determination. She therefore agreed with the practice of exempting Year 9 students from doing Japanese if they were having major problems in coping with foreign language study.

Although Japanese was compulsory for the Year 8s, many still had a positive attitude towards that particular language as well as foreign language study generally. Two girls said they were interested in finding out what a foreign language was like. Another said she eventually wanted to teach foreign languages. A Japanese resort under construction nearby would bring Japanese tourists into the area and would also help to increase employment prospects – some students, therefore, believed Japanese would become useful after school.

The Year 10 students who had chosen to continue their foreign language study had done so for various reasons. For example, they felt that foreign language study broadened one's outlook. One girl said she simply wanted to be able to speak another language. One student had plans to follow a career in journalism for which a foreign language was required, while another said she planned to become a doctor and go to work in Japan. Some had continued because they had found foreign language learning interesting.

Two of the three Year 11 girls said they planned to go into a field of study or a career in which they would use Japanese. The third student explained she did not plan to include Japanese specifically in any of her future study or career plans, but only wished to study a foreign language for its own sake.

All three student groups interviewed were overwhelmingly in favour of studying Japanese, rather than any other foreign language. Only three of the Year 8 girls suggested they would have chosen French, Italian or German because each had relatives who spoke these languages. One Year 8 student appeared to be unhappy in the class and could not see any need or use for studying foreign languages. The present Year 10 group had been asked to choose between Japanese and French in Year 8, and as was mentioned before, because only two had chosen to do French, the subject was dropped from the curriculum.

When asked to describe the ideal foreign language student, each group said that such a person would have to be motivated and enjoy the subject. The Year 10s said the ideal foreign language student had to be disciplined and determined. The Year 10 and Year 11 classes thought some students had a flair for languages and believed that a good memory was an essential characteristic. The Year 8s said one had to be intelligent and studious, but the Year 10 class thought that an average intelligence was sufficient and that the ideal student had to be able to work consistently and alone. The Year 11 girls suggested such a student would have to read a lot, be attentive in class and be able to think quickly.

None of the students interviewed could think of any reason why both boys and girls should not study foreign languages, although some suggestions were made as to why fewer males chose to do a foreign language subject. The Year 10 girls suggested that males were not sufficently attentive or meticulous, which were qualities needed for successful foreign language study. The Year 11s suspected that male students were more inclined to choose science-oriented subjects, although they could give no reason for this preference.

Most of the students thought that foreign language learning tended to be more difficult than the learning involved in other subjects. The Year 8 girls said that concepts were often difficult to grasp in the foreign language, while other subjects usually required the simple learning of facts. 'Starting from scratch' was also a problem, as was the lack of opportunity to practise using the language. Having to learn a new pronunciation and script was another factor which rendered the learning of a foreign language, and in particular Japanese, more difficult than other subjects. Both the Year 10 group and two Year 11 girls claimed that the major difficulty was that successful foreign language study required cumulative learning. The Year 10 girls also mentioned interference from the mother tongue and two of the Year 11 girls believed it was necessary to have a teacher with a sound knowledge of the foreign language. The third Year 11 student found foreign languages easier than other subjects.

Teacher's perceptions of the attitudes of others towards foreign language study

The Japanese teacher explained that when Japanese was first introduced in the school in Year 9, the students were under great pressure to reach the required standard for Year 10 in two years rather than the more usual three. This problem was compounded by the fact that the former Japanese teacher did not have a working knowledge of the language, and the old textbooks did not engender good teaching techniques. While the principal did not agree, the Japanese teacher felt that this initial bad experience resulted in the students developing the attitude that Japanese and foreign language study generally, were difficult. This attitude, she explained, had since permeated throughout the school. For this reason, she believed that most students had negative feelings about foreign language study and about Japanese in particular.

When asked how students felt about their foreign language lessons, the Japanese teacher said this depended to some extent on their mood, and this depended on whether they had had a good or bad lesson in the previous period. The Japanese teacher mentioned that Year 8 Japanese lessons 'can be lots of fun' and that the students enjoyed the songs, games and other activities. It is appropriate at this point to elaborate on the students' comments about their Japanese lessons. All three groups maintained that how they enjoyed their lessons depended on their teacher's mood. The Year 8 girls added that the interest level of the work to be done also had an effect. The Year 10s commented that their Japanese lessons were either 'exceedingly fun' or 'exceedingly fearful'. Despite their teacher's moods, however, they still enjoyed learning Japanese. Similarly, the Year 11 girls said that they preferred their lessons to be less 'nervy'. They knew their teacher set high standards which sometimes created too much tension in the class. Only one Year 11 girl said she enjoyed all other subjects (except mathematics) more than Japanese.

As far as their homework was concerned, the Japanese teacher often explained to them the need for it, although she found it a difficult task to convince them that listening to tapes, for example, contributed to the development of their language skills.

The Japanese teacher remarked that she often encouraged those students, particularly in Year 8,, who felt they were 'dumb' in Japanese and tried to give them the opportunity to be successful in class. She had noted that most students didn't have great expectations about their abilities in the language, but that they often tended to surprise themselves. She suspected that this attitude was related to the belief that Japanese was difficult.

The school did not have a guidance officer, but a 'careers teacher' was available to help students in their choices. A careers room had been set up where students could consult various types of literature regarding subject choice. The Japanese teacher said that any student seeking information about foreign languages would be sent to her.

She pointed out that amongst the parents there was a vocal minority who were against foreign languages and whom she believed to be misinformed and manipulated by their children. She also thought some were against foreign languages because of their own bad experiences with foreign language study at school. She added further that men, in particular, were anti-foreign-languages and that the male teaching staff in schools often had a negative attitude towards foreign languages, and students were influenced by this.

Students' perceptions of the attitudes of others towards foreign language study

None of the students in the three groups interviewed appeared to have had any contact with the careers teacher regarding advice on foreign language study. Two Year 11 students mentioned that their form teacher had taught French and that she appreciated the opportunity to speak the language whenever possible.

The majority of all the students interviewed said that their parents considered foreign language study, but especially the study of Japanese, a wise choice. The Year 8s and Year 11s explained that their parents supported their learning Japanese because of Australia's trading links with, and its geographical proximity to, Japan. Other parents saw an advantage in having Japanese for their children's future career and employment prospects. One Year 10 girl said her parents considered foreign language learning a worthwhile choice because it broadened her outlook on life. One Year 11 girl said her mother's attitude was a positive one, but her father did not like foreign languages because of his bad experiences at school when studying Latin. In contrast to this, a second Year 11 student remarked that her father had studied French at school and liked it (although he hated Latin). The third Year 11 student said her parents had not studied a foreign language but nonetheless considered foreign language study to be an essential part of her subject choices.

Only two girls in Year 10 said their parents were against foreign language study, but this was related specifically to Japanese. The father of one girl had a personal dislike for a Japanese businessman who was building a resort in a local region. The parents of the second girl initially believed Japanese would enhance their daughter's employment prospects, but they believed the economic climate had subsequently altered her chances in this respect.

The Year 10 girls said their peers not doing foreign languages thought they were 'suckers' but at the same time admired them for studying Japanese, because of the amount of work involved. However, they always displayed interest in what they were doing in class and in what their teacher had told them about Japanese culture, for instance. The Year 11 class said their friends who had not chosen to do Japanese were glad they were not studying it.

Students' comments about foreign language teachers

The Year 8 girls were eager to contribute their views regarding any negative teacher characteristics. They did not like an impatient, sarcastic teacher who expected students to understand immediately, who didn't explain anything they couldn't understand and who raced through the work to be covered. A bad teacher was one who set work and then neglected the class or who didn't teach enough culture and did not arrange activities relating to the foreign language, outside the classroom.

The students in Year 10 regarded as a bad foreign language teacher one who was too textbook-oriented and who talked too much without giving the students an opportunity to use the language. They did not like a 'snob' teacher who embarrassed and belittled them.

The only major comment made by the Year 11 class was about their own teacher. They said she expected very high standards from them in their language work. This was a quality in her they admired. However, they said this had a negative effect on them because it made them tense during the lessons.

The Year 8 and Year 11 students said a good foreign language teacher was one who was prepared to help and explain when they encountered problems and who was interested in the language he/she taught. The Year 10 girls said a competent teacher was one who understood the limitations and difficulties encountered by students, and for the Year 11s a good teacher was a tolerant one. The Year 8 students suggested a teacher should be able to infuse the lessons with a variety of activities without having to use a textbook all the time. Both the Year 8s and Year 11s believed a good or competent teacher had to know the foreign language well and the Year 8s added he/she ideally would have been to the country concerned and would be able to relate his/her experiences to the class.

Lessons and related activities

Each group of students interviewed was asked to give an indication of the types of tasks they expected themselves to be able to perform in the foreign language.

The two classes in the junior school were confident they had the basic survival skills in the language. For example, both Year 8s and Year 10s believed they could ask and give directions. The Year 8s said they could cope with greetings, obtaining hotel accommodation and food, transport, asking others if they spoke English and answering simple questions if arrested by the police. The Year 10 girls said they could handle conversations about household-related topics and could cope with shopping. However, they suspected they would only probably comprehend the gist of conversations and were not capable of reading newspapers and magazines because of the limited number of kanji they had learnt.

Of the three classes, the Year 11 students were the least confident and most cautious regarding their ability in Japanese. Two of the three girls said they could not do much with the language they had learnt so far and believed they had acquired only basic language skills. The third girl was more optimistic and was probably the best student of the three because she had recently won a scholarship to Japan. The three students indicated that they could find their way around, ask and give directions, obtain food (although one said she would probably not be able to read a menu), indicate illness and their likes or dislikes. As far as reading was concerned, they agreed they would be able to read signs with difficulty, and newspapers and magazines would pose a problem, for the same reason as given by the Year 10 class.

Each class was then asked to describe any other topics or language situations they had dealt with in class. The Year 8 class had covered various topics and knew the Japanese vocabulary relating to sports, school subjects, foreign languages, foods and geography. They added that they had learnt how to form the present and past tenses.

The Year 10 class had learnt how to order food, tell the time, ask for things, indicate illness, greet people, use telephones and give general descriptions of pictures. They had also learnt some slang and formal expressions.

In commenting on the same question, the Year 11 girls indicated some problems they had encountered. For example, they explained how difficult it would be for them to describe Australia to the Japanese and in turn how difficult it would be for them to understand Japanese etiquette.

The three groups concurred that what they had been taught in class was useful. The Year 10s felt they had covered the 'basics' and the Year 11 students felt that the language they had dealt with had been useful because it conveyed the grammatical point the teacher was attempting to teach.

The Year 8 girls pointed out that their teacher did not regularly indicate to them in advance what work was to be done, or the reason for this. In contrast to this, the Year 10 students explained that they usually knew what to expect on a day to day basis and that their teacher sometimes did indicate what was to be prepared for a new chapter. She also gave them some indication of the cultural components to be covered. Some of the Year 10 students claimed they did not mind not being aware of the work to be done too much in advance because they said this relieved them of the stress involved in wondering how they could manage to complete all the work. The Year 11 girls said that their teacher sometimes explained why she would be teaching several chapters as a unit, but usually, the work proceeded chapter by chapter. At the beginning of the semester, the class was given a very broad outline of the assessment requirements.

The Year 8 class explained the kinds of activities they did in class. These included dialogues around the class, singing and separating into groups for 'competitions' about Japanese culture. Their teacher also asked students questions around the class and sometimes used pictures as a basis for this exercise. The Year 8s once did Japanese origami (paper folding) in class. The class, on the whole, agreed that such activities were fun and were good for learning. In addition to their textbook, the girls said they used other books, dictionaries and sheets of cultural notes. They were regularly given tapes for homework (listening/repetition exercises). The teacher had videos and films screened whenever these were relevant to the particular work being done in class.

The Year 10 group said they also had question-answer activities around the classroom but in addition to this, they sometimes divided into two groups and asked each other questions. Short plays and dialogues were also performed with appropriate props, e.g. they explained that they once brought a bicycle into the classroom. The class said that they liked the variety and humour which their teacher injected into her lessons. They also said they had films, videos and tapes on cultural and linguistic aspects of Japanese. They had used special brushes for Japanese caligraphy and games designed to aid the learning of Japanese script.

The Year 11 girls said they marked homework and took turns to write it on the board. Whenever a new section of work was started, it was often done as a play. New points of grammar were learnt by getting them (the students) to think up different examples for the same point of grammar. They considered these activities 'fairly good'. In addition to using the prescribed textbook, they indicated that their teacher showed films about three or four times a year and distributed tapes relevant to their lesson once a week, on both cultural and linguistic aspects of Japanese. They occasionally saw slides.

Each class was asked if there was anything they wished to change about their foreign language lessons. The Year 8 class said they preferred their teacher to go at a slower pace in class and to give them the opportunity to clear up problems at the end of lessons. They wanted to have more Japanese culture and excursions, and to try out more Japanese food.

The Year 10s said they wanted to do more conversation in class. They explained that although they had 'learnt a lot', they needed to use it more in conversations. They also said they preferred to have some lessons outside the classroom.

The Year 11 girls had two major complaints – they described a certain language 'game' which required them to give only correct answers. In the case of errors being made, they were obliged to start again – they found this activity useless and a waste of time, especially because their teacher did not indicate to them the nature of the mistake that had been committed. They also did not like the teacher's fast pace when she and the students read material out aloud together.

Each class was happy with the prescribed textbook, *Alfonso*, and the Japanese teacher herself felt it was a vast improvement on the former textbooks she had used – she said it was more geared to secondary students.

The Japanese teacher described some of the activities associated with Japanese but which did not directly occur inside the classroom. She explained that the school had had some Rotary exchange students from Japan, although there had been none in the recent past. The school was expecting one Japanese exchange student from a different scheme (American Field) in 1983 or 1984. In addition to this, a Japanese student was expected in July–August 1983 (on an Australia–Japan Businessmen's Association Scholarship) and one of the Year 11 girls (who was interviewed) was leaving for Japan in November 1982 on a similar scholarship.

The Japanese teacher further explained that she had taken a class to the local Botanical Gardens which also contained a Japanese Garden. She had also taken some students to Brisbane for a 'Japanese Day' – she believed such occasions were valuable for her students in that they helped to break down their feeling of isolation. There were not many Japanese films available, although *Shogun* had been screened at one of the local cinemas. She regretted the fact that there were no Japanese restaurants in the town for students to visit. There had been a Chinese restaurant which provided a selection of Japanese food on request, but it was no longer operating.

A trip to Japan was being planned for 1983. The Japanese teacher said she intended taking a group of 10–15 girls on a minibus tour of the Japanese countryside. However, she was not certain that the trip would proceed because of the cost involved for the students.

Learning environment

The Year 8 class described the Japanese classroom as small and cluttered with 'Japanese things'. They complained of some noise from the primary section of the school and from the gardener. They found their chairs uncomfortable because of lack of writing space, although they agreed that these were better than having desks. However, it was pointed out by the principal that this was only a temporary situation pending reallocation of rooms and the establishment of a permanent Japanese room. Although the Japanese lessons were spread evenly in the week, they said that three periods (1 x 45 minutes; 2 x 50 minutes) were sufficient, especially given the size of the class (31 students).

Only one of the Year 10 girls thought the room was small and crowded. The remainder of the class felt 'at home' in the room and considered themselves a select group. They said that the many Japanese items in the room made them feel Japanese. They considered the chairs and semi-circular arrangement relaxing and conducive to conversation. The class had four periods of 50 minutes each week and thought they were getting sufficient attention from the teacher during these periods. They had one two-day break between lessons during the week and found that useful for getting homework done. They noted a considerable difference between the amount of time and size of the class they had in Year 10 compared to the conditions they had experienced in Year 8, during which they had only two periods per week with the class of thirty.

The Year 11 girls found the Japanese resources room (their regular classroom) small and cosy. They too complained of noise from the primary section. They felt the Japanese items and props were good and created a 'nice atmosphere'. The few tables in the room were arranged in a circular manner and the students considered this a good idea. However, they said that although the setting appeared informal, their lessons were not like this. They said they didn't like being so close to the teacher, who made them feel tense and nervous.

Although the Year 11 class was allotted four 50 minute periods for Japanese each week, the three students said they needed more time to reinforce their learning – one of the four periods was held in the library without their teacher.

Timetable concerns

The Japanese teacher claimed that in Years 11 and 12, foreign languages were always the last to be accommodated in the timetable. She remarked that she was now happy with the manner in which foreign language periods had been spread across the week for each year level, although she had 'made a fuss' to improve their organisation. She pointed out that the Years 11 and 12 classes were to be combined, but she had given up two spare periods to avoid this. With regard to the 45 minute and 50 minute periods, she felt these were too long for the Year 8s. Because she was the only Japanese teacher in the school, all levels were taught solely by her.

Administrative support

The Japanese teacher was asked to comment on her perceptions of the principal's attitude to foreign languages and foreign language study. She believed that the principal could see the value in the study of foreign languages (as the principal herself had indicated during her interview). However, the Japanese teacher conceded that while the principal saw the educational value in foreign language study and would be upset to see foreign languages die out, she was, at the same time, tied down by the economic constraints operating in the school.

When the need for resources arose, the Japanese teacher said she would make the necessary recommendations and then submit these to the Trust for approval, and usually had the backing of the principal. Sources of funding included student levies, money provided by the Parents and Friends Association and a $10 000 donation from a Japanese businessman with interests in the area. She explained that she had been asked for recommendations by the principal and Board of Trustees concerning the $10 000 donation, and these had been accepted. Half of the funds would be spent on a computer and a video filming unit for the Japanese department. The computer would be used as a learning aid (for vocabulary and other simple language activities). With an attached daisy wheel (for Japanese characters), the computer could be used to produce examination papers in large quantities. The remainder of the funds ($5000) would be invested to build up a fund for a proposed sister school scheme in Japan for exchange students.

The Japanese teacher said that she had never been refused time off for attendance at foreign language related meetings, seminars or conferences. For example, she had flown to Brisbane for moderation meetings and in 1980, the Trust had given her the air fare to attend the 1st Japanese Teachers' Conference in Canberra.

Despite the principal's favourable attitude towards foreign languages in the school, the Japanese teacher felt that the administration as a whole was more oriented towards science and pointed out that science and mathematics remained compulsory in Year 10, while Japanese became an option. She also suspected that some teachers enticed students unfairly into continuing with certain subjects by almost assuring them that they would get good results. She also suspected that some teachers conveyed the idea to students that foreign languages were useless.

Teacher's general self-evaluation

The Japanese teacher said she felt tired and likened herself to the 'last of the Mohicans'. She added that trying to influence some students to study Japanese was 'like a crusade'. She thought that her linguistic abilities were fair and a lot better than those of some teachers. She admitted that she was losing confidence as she became older, although she was very confident of her knowledge of Japanese culture. She explained, however, that she still suffered from culture-shock whenever she returned to Japan. After completing a B.A. with honours in Japanese language and literature at the University of Queensland (she had not trained as a foreign language teacher), she spent some time working as an information officer at the Osaka World Exposition in 1970. She then took up a two year scholarship at a university in Tokyo and furthered her language study. Some time after, she was awarded a Japan Foundation Grant. This bursary aimed at acquainting teachers of Japanese and Japanese related subjects with various Japanese educational institutions during the Australian Christmas school holidays.

Condition of foreign languages — present and future

The three classes and their teacher were asked to comment on the reasons for the decline in foreign language enrolments in the State.

The Japanese teacher posited three basic reasons. She attributed the decline partly to bad teaching in foreign languages. This was a point raised by the Year 11 group who suggested that many foreign language teachers were not properly qualified to teach foreign languages. The Japanese teacher also believed that the pro-science attitudes of principals (the majority of whom she thought tended to have non-humanities backgrounds) permeated throughout schools and had an effect on students' choices. The Year 11s made a comment related to this — they believed foreign languages were not encouraged and/or too much emphasis was placed on science and mathematics subjects in many schools. Finally, the Japanese teacher thought that foreign languages were not related to students' general interests.

All three classes suggested that enrolments were poor because of the perceived difficulty and the hard and constant work involved in foreign language study. Both the Year 8s and Year 10s said that students often chose subjects according to the rating they expected. The Year 10s said many students suspected their TE score would be adversely affected by Japanese. Another suggestion made by the Year 8 class was that some students regarded foreign languages as a non-serious subject in which they merely dabbled. Both Year 8 and Year 10 students suggested other subjects were regarded as being more useful or relevant in terms of future job prospects. The Year 8s said that many students were discouraged by their parents for the same reason just mentioned. Year 8s and Year 11s suggested that the teacher's attitude or personality was a strong factor influencing students' choices. The Year 8 class added further possible reasons: peer group pressure not to do foreign languages and wanting a change in Years 11 and 12 after three years of doing a foreign language. They also suggested (as did the Year 11s) that because of Australia's geographic isolation, travel prospects for most students were slim and if a foreign language were required, it was felt that it could easily be learnt without a teacher.

The Japanese teacher believed that one way to improve foreign language enrolments was for schools to improve teachers' working conditions, e.g. by giving them a lighter teaching load, thereby allowing more time for preparation of lessons. This was particularly needed in Japanese since extra resources were not commerically available and had to be individually prepared by the teacher. However, the principal believed that the small Japanese classes in the upper school compensated for the extra preparation required because of the reduction in the amount of time needed for correction. The Japanese teacher also felt that teachers in independent schools should be granted long service leave after 10 years instead of fifteen. This would enable them to take refresher courses, which teachers of Japanese particularly needed since they were so isolated from native speakers.

She felt the MLTAQ was not politically strong enough to effect major changes. Another drawback for Japanese was that the ROSBA seminars were organised by people without a Japanese background, although she admitted that since Japanese was strong in the region, the Japanese teachers tended to monopolise ROSBA meetings. She thought, however, that the eventual effect of the new syllabus would be a good one for students because of the change from a norm-based assessment to a standards-based assessment. She added that while ROSBA would not greatly affect her present teaching style, it would force her and other teachers to think more about the way they taught. As for teacher training courses, she believed the first step towards improving them was to change the people in the institutions who taught the courses — this opinion was based on what trainee teachers had told her.

She considered that the future for foreign languages depended, not on making foreign language study compulsory in schools, but rather on making people aware of what foreign languages were about. She felt that a period of re-education was needed in order to make Australians realise the value of foreign languages.

STUDY NO. 6 A State secondary department situated near a provincial city in the Darling Downs region – *French*

PROCEDURES USED

A total of one and one-half days was spent in the school by two researchers during the second last week of November 1982. The principal was interviewed on the first day for about one hour while the French teacher was interviewed during the second day of the visit. This interview was arranged over two spare periods and lasted about one hour.

Two classes of French students were interviewed on the first day in the school. These same classes were then observed during a regular French lesson of one period. The school was part of Phase III in the implementation of the ROSBA foreign languages syllabuses. A survey of library and audio-visual resources for French was also carried out.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE SCHOOL

School profile

In 1982, the total enrolment in the secondary section of the present school was less than one hundred. The school population was almost entirely Anglo-Irish or -Scottish, with no native language other than English being spoken. There was only one girl of German descent but no German was spoken in the home. The principal remarked that to the people in the local community, the term 'a multicultural society' had very little meaning.

	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	TOTAL
1982	37	36	22	95

Foreign language background and organisation

The only foreign language ever offered in the school was French, which was introduced in 1964 when the school was established as a secondary department. The study of French was compulsory in Year 8 only. In 1982, in Year 9, French was timetabled against woodwork, home economics and shorthand (by correspondence). However, a change in the timetable was planned for Year 9 from 1983 onwards which could allow students to do both French and shorthand. In both Year 9 and Year 10, English, mathematics and science formed a compulsory core of subjects.

The principal pointed out that in the three years he had been at the school, there had been three different teachers of French. He considered this a 'fairly grave' situation but explained that there were reasons for such a high turnover rate. He said the first teacher was replacing a local girl who had applied for a transfer to broaden her experience. Her replacement was a 'globe trotter' who did not intend to remain for more than a year. The second teacher had promotional aspirations and became assistant principal in another school. He was then replaced by the present teacher in 1982 who had just completed her teacher training the previous year.

The principal remarked that he had pushed French as a subject in order to continue making it a viable subject in the school. However, the French teacher drew attention to the fact that the 1983 Year 9 enrolment would be reduced because of a clash with home economics. She explained she would be losing some of her best French students (girls) to home economics. While in 1982 there were 17 Year 9 French students, she expected to have only 10 in 1983 because of this. She added that in contrast to this, those boys who chose woodwork were not her strongest French students.

The principal questioned the validity of exempting students with poor literacy skills from doing a foreign language in Year 8. He believed that such students may benefit from having to learn a completely new language because it gave them another opportunity to see languages operate. (He admitted, however, that he was speaking from the point of view of a principal in a small school.) He also raised another problem which was to be faced in the case of less able children: that of choosing which subject to exempt such students from. The French teacher felt that students needed to be proficient in English to cope successfully with foreign language study in Year 9 and Year 10 because of the present emphasis on grammar and writing. She said it helped to have 'an ear' for the language.

Language choice

The principal said he was happy to have French as the foreign language in the school, although he found it difficult to justify when he was asked why the school didn't teach Indonesian, for example. Nonetheless, he regarded French as relevant, in particular because of its similarities to English. He said that the school was constrained to make choices and these were largely dependent on the available staff. He also doubted the value in offering a number of foreign languages each for part of Year 8, because he suspected that they became too 'watered down'. If a change in foreign language had to be made, he would ask the local community to make a choice and he suspected that German would probably be a popular choice.

The French teacher felt that although she would personally opt for French, she considered that any European language would be appropriate, as well as an Asian language, in order to provide students with a sharp contrast in language and culture.

Library and audio-visual resources

The library was poorly stocked with books and materials for French. The language section contained some grammar books of a traditional nature as well as some audio-lingual courses. This was in addition to the recently acquired class sets of Horan and Wheeler's *A New French Course*, which were housed in the regular French classroom. There was also a French dictionary and a two volume series Le Français Scientifique et Technique.

In the literature section, there were a few books from the series Je lis tout seul, designed for French children learning their mother tongue. There were also some Asterix cartoon books, other picture stories for children and a French Charlie Brown book. Scattered about the library in other sections were a few books on various aspects of France — cultural, social and geographic. The library attendant explained that there was a need for books and materials for students with a reading age in French of Year 1 and Year 2, but with the interest level of teenagers.

In the staffroom and on the French teacher's desk, there were more French grammar books and a series of texts on various topics including travel, family life and culture in France.

The school had recently acquired a video cassette recorder, as well as a video camera. Two colour television sets were available, as well as some overhead projectors, film strips, classroom and individual slide projectors. However, nothing was held in the way of slides, films or videos for French. The only sound cassettes available were part of a French audio-lingual course.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

The only French teacher in the school was interviewed, as well as two of her classes. These were a Year 8 class of 18 students (10 boys, eight girls) and a Year 9 class (16 students present – four boys, 12 girls). Comments from the principal's interview are also included in this section.

Reasons for studying foreign languages and general views about foreign language learning

Both the principal and the French teacher thought that foreign language study would give students an appreciation, or broaden their understanding of, another culture. The principal drew attention to the fact that the students in the present school were only exposed to the local community and the 'television culture', and the only language ever heard spoken was English. He added that he hoped the study of French would also make them appreciate English. The French teacher also believed that French gave students an insight into English, but she felt that the good English students benefited most in this respect. She felt that a further advantage of foreign language study was simply the fun involved in speaking another language.

The two classes suggested several advantages associated with foreign language study and in particular, the study of French. They both cited future travel and career prospects, and similarities between French and English as advantages. Some students in each class suggested that knowing a foreign language was valuable in itself and that it broadened one's linguistic outlook. One Year 8 student said a foreign language could be used to 'show off'. Students in Year 9 suggested that being able to talk to other people and to read a foreign language was an advantage, and that the culture was interesting.

With regard to the status of foreign languages in the school curriculum, the French teacher agreed with the compulsory status of French in Year 8. She put forward as reasons for supporting this policy, the same reasons cited as benefits to be gained from the study of a foreign language. She added that since foreign language study became more difficult in later years, she could see no use in forcing students to continue, because the majority who had no desire to continue only ended up frustrated and hating the foreign language. The principal put forward similar views, stating that forcing students to study a subject in which they were not achieving was an unsatisfactory use of school time. Moreover, subject choices had to be made at some stage, since it was impossible for students to study every subject available.

Some of the Year 8 class, for whom foreign language study was compulsory, said they would have chosen to do a foreign language regardless of the status of the subject. They claimed that it was 'different' and they saw the study of French as a basis for learning other foreign languages. Those in the class who said they would not have chosen to study a foreign language said that other school subjects were more interesting, and they could see no use for a foreign language after leaving school. For example, one student explained that travel to France was doubtful and that it was better to see one's own country first. Another student felt that the language learnt at school would not be adequate for communication with native speakers. The reasons given by the Year 9s for choosing to study French instead of another subject were related, for some, to poor choices on the timetable, as well as an organisational constraint which forced students choosing business principles to do French as well. Others said they wanted to continue with French to Year 11 and Year 12. Further reasons given by other students were associated with travel to French-speaking countries and career prospects.

Some alternative foreign languages suggested by the Year 8s for study instead of French included German or Japanese because of Australia's trade links with the countries, and Latin because of its relevance to English. About half the class were happy to be studying French. One Year 8 student suggested Spanish and another, Hindustani, because they wanted to travel to Mexico and India. Some of these language alternatives were also suggested by some of the Year 9 students for similar reasons. One girl of German descent wanted to study German because of her parents' background.

While both classes agreed that foreign language study was suited to both males and females, one Year 8 boy observed that girls coped better with foreign language study, although he could not explain why this was so. The ideal foreign language student, however, according to the Year 8s was a person who was academically good all round, able to transfer knowledge across subjects, and in particular, good at pronunciation and quick to understand. The Year 9 students mentioned being able to change one's accent and being able to understand how a language is structured. A good memory was also essential. They said that in addition to this, the ideal foreign language student had to be interested in foreign languages and needed to be especially attentive in class when the teacher spoke the foreign language.

Both student groups cited having to 'start from scratch' as a factor which rendered foreign language study more difficult than study in other subjects. Language was regarded by both classes as being very complex. The Year 8s, for example, explained that there were many variables to work with in a foreign language, compared to mathematics which only had 10 basic numerals. The Year 9 group believed the difficulty was related to the fact that foreign language study combined linguistic as well as cultural aspects, while the Year 8 students mentioned having to deal with problems of pronunciation. The two classes also referred to the time factor – the Year 8s remarked that they had only a short time to master the subject and the Year 9 students pointed out that the benefits in foreign languages were available only in the long term. Another difficulty associated with foreign language study for some of the Year 9s was that learning was often 'parrot fashion' and students didn't really understand what they were learning. A final remark made by some of the Year 9 students was that they had no opportunities to actually use the language outside the classroom. This was in contrast to the obvious application of learning done in the science classroom to the outside world, they said.

Teacher's perceptions of the attitudes of others towards foreign language study

The French teacher said that about one-third of her Year 8 class really enjoyed French and could see the benefit in 'just learning it'. The majority of her Year 8 students wanted to finish after one year and could not see any point in learning French at all. She described her Year 9s as 'a clever class' who found French study a pleasure. In contrast to this, the Year 10 students were all having difficulties and their attitude towards the end of the year was one of relief.

The French teacher remarked that the students' reaction to their lessons depended on the type of lesson involved. For example, the Year 8 class enjoyed oral work and games in particular. They didn't mind written work (as seen during an observation of the same class) if not too much was done without a break. She said the attitude of the Year 9 class was similar to that of the Year 8 students, while the Year 10 class were determined not to enjoy anything. However, she observed that they participated in oral work less grudgingly. When the Year 8 students were asked to rate their French lessons in terms of enjoyment, they appeared to have some difficulty in deciding and no clear cut opinions were given by the group. It is worth noting that the majority of the Year 9 students said they enjoyed French more than mathematics, but enjoyed other subjects more than French.

The school policy was to set homework each day in every subject. The French teacher said that most students did not mind this and the work generally was done.

She thought that the Year 8 students had sensed they had progressed in French throughout the year although she believed this was largely due to the fact that while none of them knew any French at the beginning of the year, they had now acquired some ability in the four skills. She was not certain how the Year 9s had perceived their progress, but she was convinced that the Year 10 students hadn't gained any sense of achievement at all. She explained that as the work became harder, they became more frustrated, did less work and by the end of the year had 'painted themselves into a tight corner'.

The French teacher could not comment on the visiting guidance officer's views on foreign languages. However, she knew that the parents she had spoken to did not regard foreign languages as necessary, particularly because there were no job prospects associated with them. She believed that those students who continued had the support of their parents. She suspected that these parents could see the long-term benefits of foreign languages, with regard to future post-secondary study options which would eventually lead to successful employment for their children.

Students' perceptions of the attitudes of others towards foreign language study

Neither the Year 8 nor Year 9 students had had any contact with the visiting guidance officer. The Year 8 group's form teacher was also the French teacher and they knew she liked foreign languages and considered them useful. It was pointed out that the Year 9 form teacher was a mathematics teacher who had travelled overseas. One Year 9 student suspected that other teachers regarded foreign languages as 'sort of an extra' rather than a core school subject.

When asked to indicate what their parents thought of foreign language study, more than 50 per cent of the Year 8 class said they were against it. On the other hand, only three of the 16 Year 9 students thought their parents were anti-foreign-languages. The Year 9 class also commented that their non-foreign-language peers considered them 'weird' for choosing to continue with French and didn't regret dropping it. They drew attention to the fact, however, that these students didn't have a real understanding of the subject.

Students' comments about foreign language teachers

Students in both classes cited as negative teacher characteristics the inability to speak the foreign language, impatience and strictness without a sense of humour. The Year 9s also mentioned the use of too much French even when students didn't understand and teaching at too fast a pace, as negative teacher traits.

Alternatively, a good or competent teacher for Year 8 and Year 9 was one who spoke the foreign language well (the Year 8s preferred a native speaker), was strict and yet good humoured. The Year 8s added that a good teacher was one who used a variety of activities and allowed students time to learn and revise work. The Year 9 class said a competent teacher was one who could explain difficulties or problems, didn't have 'pets' or 'doesn't pick on you'.

Lessons and related activities

The Year 8 students explained that they had acquired enough French to be able to get their meaning across by using single words and gestures. In this way, for example, they could relate to French speakers what school was like, they could ask for food and could cope if they required medical assistance. They felt confident they could read information brochures, labels on food and important signs.

Similarly, the Year 9 class said that they could only carry on a simple conversation, since they felt they had acquired only basic survival French. The students said they could talk about themselves, understand directions, handle bills (hotel, restaurant) and translate very simple sentences.

Each class was asked to describe any other tasks or situations they had learnt to handle in the foreign language. The Year 8 students said they could cope with shopping and had dealt with the following topics – animals, the beach, fruit, colours, numbers, transport and parts of the body. The Year 9 class said they had learnt expressions such as 'ça va', and dealt with catching trains, shopping, meeting people and eating in a cafe. The students said they had also done simple French history and geography and had discussed some aspects of etiquette.

About 50 per cent of the Year 8 students commented that what they had done was not useful and that they needed to learn more phrases, especially with regard to seeking information and giving commands. The Year 9s, however, felt that they had been taught some essential and basic language.

The two classes were then asked to describe the kinds of activities done in class. The Year 8 group said they usually did written grammatical exercises from their textbook and corrections which involved reading the answers out aloud. They considered these activities 'too booky' and one boy suggested that the teaching should be more personalised, i.e. that there should be more communication between the students in the class. One student suggested having more plays. Some said they needed more work on pronunciation (the teacher had used a series of records for pronunciation exercises). Another suggestion was for the class to see films about France.

The Year 9 students complained of doing 'lots of exercises' based on the grammar in the prescribed textbook. Translations of passages from the book were also done, either individually or in groups. The Year 9s also explained that they had once taped themselves and then listened to their recordings as a learning exercise. Like the Year 8 class, the Year 9 students wanted to have more conversation. In addition to this they wanted to hear more authentic French, but 'not just single words', and to have games like bingo.

Both classes were using Horan and Wheeler's, *A New French Course*. Despite their assertion that their lessons were too much centred around the book, the students generally agreed that it was a good reference book, well set out and easy to follow. Each class expected their work to proceed on a chapter by chapter basis, although their teacher did not indicate to them in advance exactly what work was to be covered or the reason for doing such work.

The French teacher had organised a Bastille Day celebration during a normal school day. The French national anthem was played at assembly and the French flag was flown. There was a bike rally similar to the Tour de France, with the presentation of a yellow jersey to the winner. A café was set up where quiches and éclairs could be bought. Parents had done the cooking and also participated in the day's activities. A concert was organised during which the students performed, in French, send-ups of nursery rhymes and also sang the Marseillaise. French bingo was also played. Proceeds from the café went to buying the class sets of Horan and Wheeler.

The French teacher was hoping to organise some French activities with the home economics students the following year. One suggestion was to visit a French restaurant in the nearest city. She envisaged this would be an all day affair, combined with other activities.

Learning environment

The room in which the two classes were interviewed was not the regular French classroom. At the time of the visit, it was being used for examinations. The two classes gave a description of their room. They said it contained a map of France, a French flag and calendar and some posters. There were some drama props which were used for English rather than French. The Year 9 students thought it was better than other classrooms, although the science room was more interesting. Some students complained of noise from the typing room, others said that there was sometimes noise from the manual arts building. Both classes did not like the traditional row behind row desk arrangement and said they preferred the desks to be in groups of two or three, as in the English classroom.

Timetable concerns

Decisions regarding the timetabling of subjects were reached after discussions held with teachers and the principal, who explained that any decisions evolved in the best interest of the school.

The 18 Year 8 students had four periods of 35 or 40 minutes each week for French. They pointed out that their teacher did not always have the opportunity to attend to every person, especially when work was being corrected in class. They found the spread of lessons suitable.

The 16 students in Year 9 had five periods of 35 or 40 minutes each week. They remarked that the adequacy of this depended on the work being done. Furthermore, they commented that the double period on a Thursday was too long for them.

The French teacher concurred with the comments made by the Year 9s regarding the length of the double period and said she tried to vary the activities during the lesson to maintain the students' interest. For example, she would organise a game towards the end of the second period. She was happy with the 35 and 40 minute single periods.

Administrative support

The French teacher said the principal was keen about foreign languages and she thought that he felt that every child should be exposed to a foreign language at some stage. She emphasised that he was always eager for her to let him know if she wanted resources. One problem, however, was that she was often unsure as to what was needed because of her inexperience. The principal had sent her to a ROSBA meeting and had encouraged her to go to the Noumea teachers 'stage'. She was unable to attend in 1982 because of the cost involved. She remarked that the principal was apologetic that, due to administrative constraints, he could not release her for the final week of teaching in 1982 to attend a two week in-service seminar for teachers of French. She also felt that teachers in the school 'worked as a team', appreciated that each subject was necessary and that this also applied to French.

Teacher's general self-evaluation

The French teacher said she felt inadequate as a foreign language teacher and commented that it was unjust to be asked to teach a subject for which she was not trained, particularly in her first year as a teacher. She had only done French as a subject to Year 12 level and thought her students were 'missing out'. She remarked that, despite this, she enjoyed teaching French. Ironically, she did not regard herself primarily as a French teacher, although she was teaching more French than her other subjects – English and history. She explained that while her knowledge of French grammar and vocabulary, and her writing skill were 'okay', her oral skill was particularly deficient. Her knowledge of contemporary French culture was 'practically zilch'. She kept to safe topics such as French heroes and personalities or geography, for which she usually consulted books.

Her academic qualifications were gained at Griffith University and Mount Gravatt (B.A., Dip.T.) with teaching subjects in English and history.

Condition of foreign languages – present and future

Both the students and their teacher attributed the decline in foreign language enrolments (especially at Year 12 level) to the fact that foreign languages were not regarded as being useful or relevant in employment. The French teacher also believed that now, many students who had planned to leave school at Year 10 were forced to continue – such students (traditionally) did not include foreign languages in their choice of subjects in the lower school. Furthermore, she felt that the traditional foreign languages such as French and German were losing their popularity because Asian languages were becoming regarded as more relevant in Australia.

The two student groups suggested that other subjects were easier. For example, in the present school, French was timetabled against subjects which they regarded as requiring less hard work and less study time, such as manual arts and home economics. The Year 9 students explained that the difficulty with foreign language study was that it required cumulative learning. Other subjects were more practical, more fun or more interesting, e.g. physical education or art.

The impatience of teachers and their lack of tolerance for mistakes was another reason posited by the two classes for the decline in enrolments. Further reasons (Year 8) were discouragement from parents, as well as from others who believed they were not disadvantaged by not studying foreign languages; the dropping of the foreign language requirement for entry to arts at the universities; and the availability of phrase books for travellers with no foreign language skills.

In terms of improving or maintaining present levels of enrolment in the school, the French teacher said that she was considering joining the Alliance Française in the nearest city. She believed that enrolments were affected by the teachers who taught the subject. Students needed to have keen and interested teachers. Moreover, she thought that both she and the principal could encourage students, via a publicity drive, to continue foreign language study through to Year 10. The French teacher suggested that the MLTAQ could also promote the foreign language cause by sending native speakers to visit schools. The principal remarked that secondary departments, which had no subject co-ordinators, required advice and input from experienced teachers in all subject areas, not only foreign languages. First year teachers who were often sent to isolated schools were in particular need of assistance.

The French teacher was of the opinion that ROSBA would force her and other foreign language teachers to think about what and how they taught. The principal pointed out that again there was a need for experienced teachers to come into the school to give demonstration classes for French and to advise on materials. The French teacher also commented that the concept of a standards-based assessment was particularly applicable and relevant to foreign languages.

Although the French teacher had not done a language method subject, she expressed the hope that teacher training institutions would equip prospective foreign language teachers with the oral proficiency to hold a 'normal conversation' in French. She also hoped that foreign language teachers would be taught strategies for the teaching of pronunciation.

As a final comment, the French teacher said she expected it would be a battle to maintain foreign languages in the schools, but she was confident they would not die out altogether. She believed that, essentially, people enjoyed speaking foreign languages and for this reason they would survive.

GENERAL OVERVIEW

The six studies contained in this report give reasonably detailed information about foreign languages in the selected schools. While a sample of six schools is far from large enough to allow generalisations to be made about all schools in a statistical sense, it is nevertheless possible to identify issues of importance beyond particular schools. These issues were identified, in these studies, either because of the consistency with which certain attitudes, practices and problems emerged, or because of the differences observed between schools across these factors. A greater number of issues could be discussed. However, this overview focuses on a small number of issues that seemed to be of most importance for those concerned with foreign languages. Each is discussed briefly below.

NUMBER OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE CURRICULUM

The number of different foreign languages offered in each school visited varied from only one (usually small schools) to a maximum of four foreign languages being available in the one school. Superficially, the availability of more than one foreign language implied a greater flexibility for students with regard to the number and type of languages they could choose. However, in the three schools which offered more than one foreign language, timetable constraints reduced the real choices to one language only*. The benefit for students in these schools lay in their initial wider choice in the type of foreign language (e.g. European or Asian) rather than the number of languages they might study, although foreign language subjects tended to be biased in favour of European languages.

When principals and teachers were asked to choose which foreign language they would ideally have included in the curriculum, in addition to, or as a replacement for the existing language(s), they showed marked preference for an Asian language. The only exception to this was school no. 4 where the principal was considering the introduction of Greek, a community language.

SUBJECTS COMPETING WITH FOREIGN LANGUAGES

An analysis of the subjects against which foreign languages were timetabled in the six schools revealed a tendency for them to be put against 'practical subjects' (e.g. woodwork, metalwork, home economics, health and physical education, art, business principles, and typing in the lower school; and geometrical drawing and perspective in the upper school). Students who decide not to continue with foreign language study often do so because they perceive such study to have little practical value (See *Foreign Languages in Secondary Schools, Report No. 3*). Impressions gained during the student interviews lead one to suspect that this attitude may be reinforced by these school timetabling practices which set a foreign language on the same line as overtly practical subjects and, as a result, make the foreign language appear as a distinct 'non-practical' alternative in the eyes of the students.

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* Although in school no. 4 it was theoretically possible to do more than one foreign language concurrently in practice this seldom occurred.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that in the six schools visited, the majority of subjects against which foreign languages were timetabled in the lower school, are those which are taken by students who tend to finish school at Year 10. This suggests that the study of a foreign language (for more than one year, beyond Year 8) is potentially being denied to a large number of high school students, since those who leave school at Year 10 represent a considerable proportion of the secondary school population.

Another point worth making relates to the view that the kinds of subjects mentioned above are those generally studied by the 'less bright' children. This in turn suggests that foreign languages are only for the 'bright' students. This view seemed to be implicit in the policy or practice of four of the schools visited regarding the exemption from compulsory Year 8 foreign language study for students who were considered to be 'academically poor' or who were diagnosed as needing remedial English. One wonders whether this policy/practice is based on the fear that such students will fail in English or whether it is motivated by a belief that such students don't have the intellectual ability to succeed in the foreign language. The principal in school no. 6 questioned the validity of exempting students with poor literacy skills from foreign language study in Year 8, because he believed that they might benefit from the opportunity to learn a completely new language. He also could not justify the exempting of students from any other subject in the curriculum at Year 8 level.

Two extreme views were encountered regarding the study of a language by students who already spoke the language in the home. In school no. 4, such students were encouraged to take a different language in Year 8, and then begin the study of their home language in Year 9. In school no. 2, all students had to study Italian in Year 8, irrespective of linguistic background.

PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY

There was a sharp contrast between principal, teacher and student views with regard to the perceived benefits and advantages of foreign language study. Principals and teachers tended to cite benefits such as a broadening of one's outlook and an appreciation and tolerance of other cultures*. Students invariably cited the instrumental and essentially egocentric benefits of foreign language study such as being able to use the language for study, work/career and travel objectives.

WHAT STUDENTS WANT IN THEIR FOREIGN LANGUAGE LESSONS

All student groups in five of the six schools indicated a strong preference for a less 'bookish' (grammar/translation) approach to the teaching of foreign languages. They almost unanimously expressed a desire for less reading/writing and more oral/aural work, in the form of conversations, role-play and language activities involving games, and greater use of films, videos or slides**. Lesson observations revealed a heavy emphasis on the teaching of grammar. English was widely used by most teachers even at times when meaningful and unambigous communication could have occurred in the foreign language, e.g. making use of predictable situations for giving commands, making comments and observations in the foreign language. Moreover, teachers rather than students initiated the majority of oral exchanges during lessons.

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* The one exception was school no. 2 where the principal and teachers believed the foreign language, Italian, would benefit their students when seeking employment.

** Students from two of the three classes interviewed in school no. 5 did not suggest changes of this nature. Lessons observed in this school had a greater input of meaningful oral/aural interaction than classes observed in other schools.

The emphasis on reading and writing was not so widespread in Year 8, in which a greater use was made of realia, role-play and conversations. This was regarded as the 'fun' approach to foreign language learning. Teachers were aware that the transition from Year 8 to Year 9 was marked by a greater emphasis on grammar or 'serious work', but said that they were bound by the (old) syllabus requirements which had an extensive grammar component. The objectives of the syllabus appeared to conflict with the overriding ambition of students to learn how to speak and understand (the spoken) language. When asked to evaluate their own language competence, students generally referred to their oral/aural skills first, which indicated a greater preoccupation with speaking and listening rather than reading and writing. It is interesting to note in this context that teachers expressed concern about the maintenance and improvement of their own oral/aural skills in particular.

Students also showed a preference for greater cultural input in their lessons. Not surprisingly, most teachers felt they lacked the necessary contact with the country of the foreign language and were worried about their lack of knowledge of current cultural and other developments.

PERCEIVED DIFFICULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY

Foreign language students interviewed in the six schools regarded the foreign language as a difficult subject. Several reasons were commonly cited for this: lack of background in the subject ('starting from scratch'); the cumulative learning required; the short time available in secondary school for learning a new language; emphasis on grammar; little opportunity to practise oral/aural skills; having to 'think' in the foreign language. The view that foreign language study was difficult was reinforced by the students' comments about the ideal foreign language student, whom they described as an intelligent person, with a good memory and a high degree of motivation.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Teachers' accounts of extra-curricular activities relating to the foreign language tended in some cases to focus on the difficulties of organising events and the prohibitive costs of trips overseas. However, each school had at least one major event each year (e.g. Bastille Day celebrations, going out to a restaurant, weekend language camps), while three of the schools had an extensive program of events.

QUALITY OF RESOURCES

The surveys of audio-visual and library resources for foreign languages revealed a paucity in some of the six schools of audio-visual material (e.g. films, videos, audio-cassettes, slides) although equipment for using such material was available (e.g. video recorders, tape recorders, slide projectors). In some cases, the few materials available were of poor quality, often out of date or lacking accompanying teachers notes. Despite this, teachers generally displayed a reluctance to ask for new resources, although principals indicated that each subject area was allocated a certain amount of money for the acquisition of materials, and that no reasonable requests would be refused.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

While language teachers had set rooms for the majority of their foreign language lessons, these were not regarded as permanent language rooms, in which equipment could be stored or materials displayed. Walls were often bare. Students often described their room as dull and uninspiring. Most resources were held in the library, usually located at a considerable distance from the regular classrooms. Only school no. 5 had both a permanent room for lessons, as well as a language resources room located next door to the classroom. Additional resources were held in the library. In classrooms used for foreign language lessons, the desks were arranged in the traditional row-behind-row manner, which students disliked. This was less of a problem for the small classes in the upper school.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

With regard to the granting of leave to teachers to attend language-related activities (seminars, workshops, conferences) priority was usually given to the subject co-ordinator. On the whole, teachers were concerned about leaving their classes, even when supervision could be arranged. Principals appeared to be flexible with regard to exempting foreign language students from attending other classes at certain times throughout the year, so that they could participate in various kinds of language activities.

While all six principals had overtly given support to the foreign language staff in the manner described above, and each had expressed positive views about foreign languages and foreign language learning, teachers did not always perceive their attitude as a positive one. The general feeling amongst the majority of foreign language teachers was that science and mathematics were given top priority by principals, as well as by other non-language teachers on the staff. Only one teacher (school no. 6) felt that the staff in her school worked as a team and regarded each subject as important in its own right.

TIMETABLE CONCERNS

Discussions about timetable matters showed there were large differences in period length within and across schools. The shortest period was 35 minutes; the longest, one hour. Foreign language teachers were particularly concerned when variations within the school resulted in classes at the same year level having unequal amounts of lesson contact time. A preference was expressed by teachers for 40—45 minute periods, but some teachers believed even shorter periods were required for Year 8 students. The preferred frequency of lessons was one per day.

In two schools, timetable constraints had resulted in the combining of two different year levels into the one class for foreign language lessons. At one of these schools, a teacher had given up spare periods to allow the two year levels to have separate lessons. Both teachers and students disliked combined classes particularly because the amount of contact time for each year level was effectively reduced by 50 per cent.

ALLOCATION OF TEACHERS TO CLASSES

In the schools with more than one foreign language teacher, decisions relating to the allocation of teachers to particular year levels were generally based on a combination of the recommendations of the subject co-ordinator to the principal, the experience/qualifications of the teachers, their commitments in other subjects and their personal preferences. There was a tendency for the least experienced teachers to be assigned to the lower school classes. In some cases, teachers with little or no formal training as teachers of foreign languages were given considerable responsibilities in the subject. In one case, minimal use was made of the expertise of a teacher who had completed extensive studies in one of the languages (Japanese) taught in the school, to which she was attached as a district relieving teacher.

EFFECTIVENESS OF LANGUAGE COMMITTEES AND ASSOCIATIONS

Teachers were generally negative about the effectiveness of many of the language committees and associations such as the Modern Language Teachers Association of Queensland (MLTAQ), syllabus committees and the Foreign Languages Advisory Committee (FLAC). These were seen to be very much Brisbane-oriented and local branches were not very active, partly because of the lack of interest and support of local teachers. Membership in the Advisory Committee was seen to be biased in favour of European languages. Moreover, many teachers believed the MLTAQ lacked the power to effect any major changes in foreign language teaching. Training institutions also came under attack.

WHY THE DECLINE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES?

Teachers and especially students attributed the decline in enrolments partly to the perceived difficulty of foreign language study, i.e. the lack of success that students had experienced in learning a foreign language. Remarks made by students throughout the interviews indicated that the difficulty was related to the emphasis on grammar and reading/writing skills, rather than oral/aural skills. It appeared that the decline in the upper school was also related to the disillusion experienced by students after Year 8 when the teaching becomes less geared to practical activities and more centred around a 'bookish' approach. Some students and particularly teachers also believed that taking a foreign language in Years 11 and 12 had a negative effect on the TE Score.

The perceived low career value of foreign languages, especially European languages and competition from more 'practical' subjects were two other major reasons posited for the decline. Foreign languages were not popular because they didn't 'get you a job'.

Many teachers also thought the abolition of the foreign language requirement for entry into the arts faculty had contributed to the decline.

FUTURE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

While teachers and principals generally felt that the traditional European languages should continue to have an important place in schools, many believed that there would have to be a stronger orientation towards Asian languages in future. These were regarded as more relevant (i.e. useful in terms of employment, study, travel) and would therefore attract more students. Some teachers were optimistic that the change in emphasis of the new ROSBA syllabuses (placing greater emphasis on developing communicative competence) would also help revive student interest. However, this optimism was balanced by the generally low morale of many teachers interviewed, and their negative feelings regarding the overwhelming amount of additional work which the introduction of the new syllabuses had involved.

S. R. Hampson, Government Printer, Queensland— 1983